Interpretation and Film Studies

Movie Made Meanings

Phillip Novak

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Phillip Novak
Le Moyne College
Syracuse, NY, USA

ISBN 978-3-030-44738-0 ISBN 978-3-030-44739-7 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7

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Cover illustration: Monica Vitti in Red Desert (1964), PhotoFest
Cover design: eStudioCalamar

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For Julie and Sophie

Acknowledgments[1]

I want to thank my colleagues at Le Moyne College who offered encouragement and/or advice, especially Chris Warner, Jim Hannan, and Bill Day. They are surely responsible for some of the book's merits, if it has any; and they are in no way responsible for any of its faults, many of which no doubt remain because I was too stubborn or stupid to take all of the thoughtful advice they so generously tendered. I also want to thank the readers at Palgrave, whose careful consideration of, and commentary on, the initial proposal helped me better see my way through to the end of the project. I am particularly indebted to whichever of the two suggested I conclude with a chapter on cinephilia. It is difficult for me now, not just to imagine *Interpretation and Film Studies* ending any other way, but to remember what thinking about the project felt like without having that end in mind. Most especially, I want to thank Julie Grossman, without whose inspiration and support the book would never have been started, and without whose knowledge, insight, and sage counsel it could never have been completed. What I know about much of anything is intricately intertwined with my knowing her; our conversations inform every feature of this text. Finally, here, too, a shout-out to Billie, who always had faith, and to Fuzzy, who didn't.

Note

1. A version of Chapter 7, "The *Chinatown* Syndrome," first appeared in *Criticism* 49.3 (2007), 255–83; and a version of Chapter 8, "'It's Like Waking': Making Meaning in and of Christopher Nolan's *Memento*," first appeared in *Journal of Film and Video* 71.4 (2019), 29–50.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The (Non)Intersections of Film and Literary Studies

Fifteen to twenty years ago the center of gravity in my professional life began to shift from focusing on literature to focusing on film. For years, I had been including film texts in courses where they seemed appropriate or at least plausible—expository writing courses, for example, where the concern was process, not content, and where I could use whatever I wanted as prompts for essays, or introductory literature courses, where I could sneak film in under the auspices of genre. Then, purely coincidentally, at a point when I was starting to imagine what it might be like to devote whole semesters to film, I found myself in an English department that had lost its sole film studies specialist. There were courses in the catalog that needed to be taught or dropped; there was a certain level of steady demand for such courses: a vacuum had been created; and there I was, again purely coincidentally, to help fill it. And so I started, rather haphazardly, and at the rate of perhaps one or two courses a year, teaching film—courses on film history and film genre; courses on the work of individual directors and on the idea of the director as author (an idea that could be both deployed and deconstructed); introductory film studies courses that included discussion of film rhetoric and film poetics. I learned the field as I taught in it, of course, because there was no good alternative to doing so, and I have often been only half a step ahead of my students. The process—slow, desultory, ongoing—has been engaging and inefficient, arduous and enlightening. On the one hand, it has troubled the trajectory of my career; on the other, it has allowed me to play at being a student well past middle age.

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_1

Of course, my personal experience—the experience, that is, of drifting into film studies from a specialization in literature—is not unique and wouldn't be worth mentioning, really, except that it bears on the positions that I want to pursue here—both in the sense that the experience served as the grounds out of which the current project emerged and in the sense that it informed the particulars of the arguments I want to develop. In what follows, I will spend a not incidental amount of time comparing film and literary studies. So, briefly summarizing the history of my coming to the teaching and studying of film will provide a route into the issues that I most want to address.

In my case, the shift in disciplinary focus was not a punctual event: I didn't simply switch, in a given year (or even over the course of several), from one field to the other. Although my interests as a scholar now center on film I continue to teach literature courses. Indeed, my current position is split between the English department and the department of communication and film studies in the small, liberal arts college where I work. So, it is not simply that I have made this transition from literature to film in a broad, overarching sense, but that regularly, on an almost daily basis, I toggle back and forth between the two fields in the work I do as a teacher. Both the larger, overarching movement in terms of my scholarship and all those daily smaller ones related to teaching have served over time to make me aware of, sensitive to, differences in the two terrains that seem to me worth noting.

One of these has to do with the students' general level of preparation—in each instance—for the work of the course. In college literature classes, however introductory they may be, students *always* enter having had some experience analyzing literary texts. They have been reading poems and plays and novels in English classes since at least sixth grade. And they know that these products can be processed in a variety of ways. Most have, for example, at least some sense of rhetoric: they can identify the strategies Iago uses to ensnare Othello, for example; they can say why—if the issue is brought to their attention—the unnamed narrator of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" repeatedly refers to John Jacob Astor when he introduces himself. Most have a rudimentary sense of poetics and narratology (although few would be able to define those terms): given the opening paragraphs of Bambara's "The Lesson," they can characterize the narrator based on the language she uses to describe her environment and experience; they can locate the tone of the concluding passage of Joyce's "Araby." Most importantly for my purposes, all of them know that one thing we can do with

literary texts is to read them for meaning. They arrive expecting to be asked to do just that. While they often struggle in various ways in their efforts at interpretation—jumping to wildly implausible symbolic or allegorical meanings in the case of poetry (before having made any attempt at dealing with the surface sense of the poem), or insisting on responding to the behavior of characters in fictional narratives as if the characters were real (and thus *missing* potential symbolic significances in these characters' actions)—they come in predisposed to work at hermeneutics, and they have at least some elementary sense of what such work entails.

In the introductory level film studies courses I teach, by contrast, the vast majority of students I see have had no experience analyzing films before they take the class. From time to time, a student will report having discussed a movie or two in high school, but typically the experience has been too isolated and too superficial to have served in any meaningful sense as training. To the extent that the students I see have been taught to respond to films—by which I mean narrative fiction films, my primary concern here and throughout[1]—they have been taught, by the culture and by the film industry, to respond to them purely as commodities, and their immediate instinct is, thus, not to analyze or interpret but to evaluate. Was the film any good? By which is meant mainly: were the sensations produced by watching this movie of a kind and of an intensity sufficient to justify the costs (calculated in terms of the time, effort, and, occasionally even, money spent acquiring the sensations)? That's the central question. "This game is stupid." "Great burger." "Dumb film." The primary problem, of course, with the immediate recourse to evaluation is that most students lack the knowledge and range of reference necessary to make informed judgments. My students have all seen a fair number of movies and a few, I imagine, consider themselves to be film buffs; but the vast majority of the films they have seen fall within a narrow band of possibilities. What they know is contemporary, mainstream, American cinema. What they have seen are hundreds and hundreds of iterations of three or four films. They are in a good position to say whether *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012) is more engrossing than *The Wolverine* (2013). But they are not well situated by their experience to compare the quality of either of these films with that of *Modern Times* (1936) or *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* (Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot, 1953) or *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1943). They are not familiar with the conventions within, and against, which the latter films operate, so these films inevitably feel to them stilted; they don't recognize that the contemporary films they admire also

maneuver in relation to sets of conventions, and since they don't register the conventionality, the action in these films, however outrageous, feels natural. They invariably complain, for example, about the rapidity with which characters in 1940s era Hollywood films fall in love, finding the immediacy of the emotion to be unrealistic. But seeing a character—say, Daniel Craig's James Bond—riding a motorcycle on the top of a moving train doesn't, for them, raise any concerns about plausibility. That spectacle is just the kind of thing one sees in films.

My students, in short, are not ordinarily prepared to do well the one thing they are taught by their experience to do with movies—that is, judge them. Some small few—the one or two cinephiles I see in any given year—will have watched not only a lot of movies, but they will have watched a handful of films very closely, even obsessively. Some will know a genre—horror, for example—very intimately. They will have read—and perhaps weighed in on—web-based debates about the plots of these films: they will know how dream states function in Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010); they will have an opinion on whether the main character in that movie is still dreaming when it ends; they will elaborate convoluted hypotheses about the relation of Neo and Agent Smith to the prophecy of the One in *The Matrix* franchise films. But the capacity of these students to comment on a film text never gets too far beyond basic explication, and that capacity is possessed, as I've said, by relatively few students. I have thus grown to expect the students in my film classes to arrive as fairly blank slates where film studies is concerned—to expect them to have no knowledge of film history, to have no experience, in particular, watching silent films or films made outside of the United States (the relatively few fans of anime that I run into excluded); to have no awareness of film rhetoric (they will not have been taught to notice lighting, framing, shot duration, editing techniques, mise-en-scene); to have no familiarity with any form of film theory; and to have no sense at all of what it might mean to analyze a movie for its meaning.

Again, I want, for reasons that will be made clear, to contrast this situation with that which prevails in introductory literature classes. There, students will come in knowing what we are talking about when we talk about grammatical point of view. None is likely to know how to define *metonymy*, or *synecdoche*, or *chiasmus*, but they will be able to explain the difference between a metaphor and a simile. They will be able to identify personification and hyperbole. They will understand the terms *setting* and *tone* and will have heard some conversation (in fact, probably too much)

about tragic heroes and tragic flaws. A few will know how to translate the phrase *carpe diem*; a few more will have discussed the idea of the epiphany. They get satire and verbal irony. The same set of students, brought down the hall to an introductory film class, will have to be taught all the terminology used to make sense of movies and all the ideas to which those terms refer. They will have to be taught the conventions of continuity editing. They will have to be shown the flattening effect that comes from shooting with a telephoto lens. They will have to learn the distinctions between a straight cut and a lap dissolve.

But learning the terminology is easy enough for most of my students. Most are, in fact, good at absorbing information. That's a skill almost all possess coming in, and one they hone throughout their college experience—in almost all the courses that they take. So I feel pretty confident going in that I can give them the language they will need to be able to crack open the movies they will watch. More importantly, because they *are* adept at processing information, I know too that, while most have little sense of the history of cinema before they take my classes, they will emerge from those classes—especially those specifically designed to cover some aspect of film history—better informed than they were when they arrived: they will have some sense of how film culture emerged in the context of, and in concert with, other forms of visual spectacle in the late nineteenth century; they will come to understand the technology of film—learning about various forms of film stock and film speeds, about early film cameras and camera analogues, about Maltese cross gears and Latham loops; they will learn something of the mechanics of motion pictures by looking at Muybridge photo series and by playing with a hand-held Zoetrope; they will study the development of continuity editing and watch films by the Lumières and Méliès, by Porter and Pastrone; they will come to know what we mean when we talk about surrealism, German expressionism, and Italian neo-realism.

Most can also be led, quickly enough, to respond, with a reasonable degree of sensitivity, to film rhetoric. They can be pretty readily taught, that is, to see more and see better in individual shots, individual scenes, shot sequences, and scene transitions. Having learned the term mise-en-scene, they will—on their own—notice the way the Lili Taylor character in Nancy Savoca's *Dogfight* (1991) is framed when she is introduced, small and hunched over her guitar in the distance, ultimately to be overshadowed by the River Phoenix character in the foreground (Image 1.1).

Image 1.1 Taking note of mise-en-scene

They will mark the transition, in *Citizen Kane* (1941), from the first half of the movie, when Kane dominates the spaces he moves through, to the second half, where he is mostly engulfed by his surroundings. Having come to understand the basic principles of continuity editing, they will perceive the breakdown—or flouting—of that system in the cop-killing sequence early on in *Breathless* (À Bout de souffle, 1960). Knowing to think about rhythm while they watch, they will note the *longueurs* of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) or the later version of his *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), the deliberate pacing of the scenes in *Battleship Potemkin* (Bronenosets Potemkin, 1925) covering Vakulinchuk's death and wake as compared to the kinetic, staccato cutting of the Odessa steps sequence. With some coaxing, they can be brought to recognize the tonal counterpointing that takes place between sound and image in *Days of Heaven* (1978).

One might well think it an easy step to move from perceiving such details to assigning them meaning. But for most of my students, this is a difficult step to take. For many, it remains permanently out of reach. In my experience, in fact, students actively resist making meaning of movies. They do so, it seems to me, because the process of interpreting films denaturalizes the experience of watching, transforming that experience from the sensation based, consumer oriented, largely somatic/emotional one

they are familiar with and thus loathe to relinquish, to a more intellectual, self-conscious, more critically distanced enterprise they see as laborious and sad. Obviously enough, these two modes of response to film (to any cultural artifact)—the sensual/affective/aesthetic, on the one hand, the intellectual/conceptual/analytical, on the other—are not (all due respect to Susan Sontag) mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are mutually informing and interdependent. The problem I encounter in my film classes—and that I don't encounter nearly so much in my literature classes (the experience of reading having been, for most of them, always already denaturalized) is that the students see them as opposed. Romantics to a person, they all come in conceiving of analysis and interpretation as antithetical, rather than conducive, to pleasure, and all, initially, when prompted to reflect on the potential implications of a bit of film they are being asked to discuss, are apt to give vent to some version of Wordsworth's lament that "We murder to dissect."[2]

To a certain extent, to be sure, students intuit basic narrative meanings—absorbing them, as it were, by osmosis, without being much aware of the process, and presenting their understanding, when called upon to do so, in the privileged form of evaluation: "Ron, the Rock Hudson character in *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) isn't realistically presented"; "I like Tony Camonte: he's charismatic; he's got an interesting anti-authoritarian streak."[3] And over time, with enough coaching, most do get adept at reading the surface features of individual shots and scenes. Several weeks into a given course, that is, most will have learned how to generate ideas out of bits of narrative information and, in the context of discussing a given film, how to explicate isolated filmic moments. They will register the whimsy in Chaplin's mad movements during the nervous breakdown scene in *Modern Times* and will come to recognize that whimsy as a central attribute of the Tramp's character. Watching brief interchanges between the mother and father in *Pather Panchali* (1955), they will see her pragmatism as a counterpoint to his dreamy idealism. They will perceive both the symbolism and the irony in Strike's (Mekhi Phifer) apparent escape by train into the vacant west in *Clockers* (1995).

My students thus gain the knowledge and have or acquire many of the skills they need to engage film culture critically. What they lack—certainly coming in, but also too often (sadly) going out—is the capacity to conceive of a movie (and again, my focus is narrative fiction films) as having meaning.[4] Because they are wedded to the idea of film as physical and emotional experience, they tend not to see cinema as a medium of

communication (although they know, in a kind of hazy way, that it is one). Because they want to naturalize what they see, they don't encounter movies as made things, as artifacts, as purposive structures. For my students, films don't "say" anything. They aren't "about" anything. They have no "point." Initially, again, this muteness of the film text is for my students nearly absolute. The only meanings movies have for them are the kinds of meanings—features or attributes, really—that we find in real world "scenes," those taking place on the street, in bars, at work: "the tall man in the corner over there doesn't like the little guy he's talking to"; "the older woman with the bangs is the leader of that little group." But even after my students have learned to find significance in the *forms* of signification—to see meaning not just in what is represented but in how it is represented—the meanings they perceive remain local, isolated: they don't—can't be made to—add up. Meaning in this more notional, more global sense—in the sense of "aboutness," as the philosophers would have it—is for my students more than merely elusive. It's not something that they chase, that recedes before them perpetually like the line of the horizon. For my students, meaning in this larger, more abstract sense just isn't there. They simply don't think about film in this way. And getting them to imagine doing so—getting them to the point where they can play with the notion that movie "X" is about, or addresses, abstract issue "Y"—is exceedingly difficult work.

In discussing meaning in such general terms, I am, of course, running together different concerns: explicit meaning (that *Casablanca* [1942] makes a case, for example, for the value of laying aside self-interest and committing to a cause; latent meaning (that, buried beneath the surface ironies of *Fargo* [1996], lies an argument about the value of simple decency)[5]; and symptomatic meaning (that the image of the sexualized, powerful woman in *Out of the Past* [1947] presents a threat to patriarchal culture that must be contained). The lines between these various types of meaning are notoriously indistinct; and different critics might well sort the same textual element into different categories according to the needs of the particular argument they are making. And some might dispense with the categories altogether. My point here is just that none of these ways of thinking about meaning is readily available to my students: who have trouble conceiving of the highly distinct characters in a given film as in any sense representative and who can't, therefore, generalize about the experiences of the characters, thus shutting off access to explicit meaning; who can't see any value in *encoding* meaning in character and event, and to

whom, thus, the idea of latent meaning makes no sense; who understand that individual human beings act on the basis of politically significant beliefs (and can thus be characterized as racist or sexist, for example) but who can't read politics into structures or processes and who are therefore blind to the ideological implications, not just of films, but of cultural formations generally.[6] "A poem," wrote Archibald MacLeish, "should not mean / But be."[7] By the time I meet them, most of my students have learned to ignore MacLeish's advice—at least where poetry is concerned. Poems, they understand, are meant to mean.[8] Film is another matter. It is not so much that, in the case of movies, they have adopted MacLeish's position, since they don't conceive of their sense of how movies work as a position. Rather, it is that an uninflected version of MacLeish's philosophy of the text has become, in relation to film texts, the ether of their understanding. Movies, for them, don't mean. Like objects in nature—like rocks and rivers and rabbits—movies, for my students, simply *are*.

I don't want to exaggerate. There are almost always in the film classes that I teach one or two students (of the twenty or so on the roster) who arrive knowing how to think, talk, and write about the meaning in/of movies: some because they have taken other film classes, either with me or someone else; some because they immediately sense how the analytical skills they have acquired in literature or art history classes (or perhaps elsewhere) apply to their work with cinema; some simply because they are exceptionally bright. There are almost always, as well, two or three other students in any given class who learn, over the course of the semester, what it means to interpret movies and who can, by the end, produce a competent reading of some aspect of an individual film. But the capacity to see movies as having meanings is not one that the students I regularly encounter easily pick up. Although, as I've said, most will, after a semester's worth of work, have a better understanding of film rhetoric and better knowledge of film history, most will, at semester's end, have no better sense of how to interpret movies than they did when they started out.

Perhaps, one might be tempted to think, the problem is the particular set of students I tend to encounter. Perhaps, for whatever array of reasons, my students are especially ill equipped to make the conceptual shift required to move from reacting to events in filmed narratives as if they were real to responding to the events as elements in a design, from appropriating movies as consumer goods to engaging them as art. All I will say here is that I do not believe this to be the case. In the course of an academic career stretching now to thirty years, I have taught at a large and

illustrious state university (the University of Virginia, where I did my graduate work and served both as a teaching assistant and as a graduate instructor), at a couple elite private universities of differing sizes (Wake Forest and Colgate), and at one of the Ivy League schools (Cornell). The students at the liberal arts college where I now teach (Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York) are more varied in terms of basic skill sets than the students at these other institutions: the brightest and best prepared are as good as any students I have seen anywhere else; the least skilled wouldn't be admitted to the other schools where I've taught. The average student I now see, however, is very similar to the average student I've seen elsewhere. In short, the make-up of the student body where I work is not, I think, the issue.

I suppose it also goes without saying that I don't see myself as the source of the difficulty—a proposition, however, that I won't defend. Suffice it to say that over the years I have had reasonable success imparting a variety of skills to the students I encounter in both my literature and my film classes. With film, however, I have repeatedly run into this problem with meaning, this recalcitrance on the part of my students when it comes to conceiving of movies as conveying ideas. My aim here is not so much to account for this problem as to find some way to respond to it.

My impulse in confronting this difficulty, when I first started teaching film, was to provide my students with sample interpretations of the films we watched. Obviously enough, the students would need to be doing other types of reading, depending on the particular requirements of, or the shifting interests within, a given course. So each week they would cover a little film history, or film poetics, or film theory. But my aim was to pair these readings with a focused interpretation of an individual movie: the chapter out of David Cook's *A History of Narrative Cinema* on "German Cinema of the Weimar Period," for example, along with an essay on *Metropolis* (1927) by R. L. Rutsky; or, later in the semester, Judith Hess Wright's "Genre Films and the Status Quo" and Lucy Fischer's essay on *White Heat* (1949).[9]

Since my primary aim in introducing the interpretive readings was simply to open my students to the idea that movies can be thought about in terms of meaning, I didn't—typically—want to focus narrowly on a particular approach. Indeed, a certain kind of catholicity in this regard would, it seemed to me, given the resistance I saw myself running into, be helpfully inviting. So one week students might be reading a 70s-era formalist interpretation of *Citizen Kane* and the next week they might be asked to

pursue a feminist analysis of *Raging Bull* (1980). They would necessarily remain, throughout, a little un-anchored; but they would, so my thinking went, get a feel for the broad array of ways one might go about making sense of a film. What I wanted, really, was just good readings—accessible, detailed, trenchant, compelling.

I was for the most part teaching well-known, often historically significant movies (as one is apt to do in a small program in a small school), so I assumed, naively it seems in retrospect, that such readings would be fairly ready to hand. I knew, from my work in the field of literature, that literary texts of any note whatsoever—defined in terms of their provenance, their influence, their ideological or philosophical or ethical weight, their relation to an historically important tradition, their literary merit, their culturally paradigmatic value, or just their popularity at the time of their publication—are invariably analyzed extensively. Any given literary text—and certainly any literary text that has the scope of a feature length fiction film (a novel or novella, a substantial short story, a long poem)—will have generated, if it has been around for any length of time, a host of competing interpretations. There have been more than 150 scholarly articles published on Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*, to take one somewhat arbitrary but, I think, fairly representative example. These are all substantive essays focused exclusively or primarily on that one text. Scores more deal with the novel in a less sustained way. And dozens of chapters or parts of chapters—in the hundreds of books that have been published on various aspects of Wharton's life, world, and work—have been devoted to discussion of *House of Mirth*.[10] "Ode to a Nightingale," "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—," "Il Penseroso," *The Waste Land*? As they say in the movies, fuhgeddaboudit. These poems collectively have served as subject for thousands of pages of commentary.[11] And even the least well known of the novels of a writer like Charles Dickens, Henry James, or Virginia Woolf—*Martin Chuzzlewit*, say, or *The Pupil*, or *Jacob's Room*—has received significant critical attention.[12]

In the case of film studies, the situation is quite different. Pretty regularly, that is, I found myself struggling to locate model interpretations of films to put before my students. Again, I don't want to exaggerate—here by overstating the scope of the problem. Some work has obviously been quite well covered. Indeed the films of certain directors—mostly drawn from that pantheon constructed in the 50s and 60s by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* crowd (Welles and Hitchcock, Renoir and Rossellini) or from the more famous figures in that crowd itself (principally, of course,

Godard)—have been as abundantly documented and dissected as anything written by Melville or Austen. The same can be said for some of the movies making up certain genres or modes that, because of their cultural resonance, have attracted exceptional attention (film noir and the Western would be the stand outs here). So, for example, *Out of the Past* (1947) and *Gilda* (1946), *Stagecoach* (1939) and *Shane* (1953) have all been pretty thoroughly "read."[13] But scholarship of this interpretive sort in film is, from the perspective of someone coming from literature, surprisingly spotty.

The reasons are, of course, largely historical: when movies began to be taken seriously by the masses as a form of art, discussion of film was dominated by a director-centered perspective that focused on people rather than texts. Movies got analyzed but mainly in passing. Books on film—those at any rate that weren't centered on some aspect of cinema history, always the mainstay of film studies, as I will argue more pointedly in Chap. 5—tended to be devoted to tracing the careers of important practitioners, the field favoring biography and histories of production.[14] When the academy turned to film in the late 60s and 70s, the move was spearheaded by literary scholars (with most film studies programs developing within departments of English or comparative literature) at a time when the study of literature was just beginning to be dominated by theory. Critics of both literature and film eschewed close reading as retrograde, ideologically suspect. While film scholars did continue to interpret movies, they did so, as it were, surreptitiously[15]: analysis, like the film text itself, was simply a vehicle for exemplifying an established theoretical construct. Much good work on individual films was produced by way of theory, but because the work of interpretation played a distinctly subordinate role, the quality of the interpretation often suffered. In any case, relatively little effort was made to engage films on their own terms. At that point—the 80s and 90s—literary and film studies turned to history and the practice of analyzing individual texts of whatever sort, while not exactly abandoned, was significantly marginalized—once again seen, though from a slightly different perspective, as retrograde and ideologically problematic. The object of analysis became, not the literary or film text, but the cultural matrix out of which that text emerged. Novels (and poems and plays), as well as movies, were no longer objects to look *at* but windows to look *through*.

I do not wish to suggest that there is anything wrong either with this turn toward history or the turn toward theory that preceded it. Far from it. In the field of literature, the move away from textual analysis made real sense. For decades, a new critical emphasis on close reading had

commanded the field, and any canonic *literary* text one might think of had surely generated a host of readings of varying quality that collectively served the purpose of enriching our sense of what was at stake in those texts. But as I've been trying to suggest, the same is not true in the case of film. Because the field of film studies emerged when it did, at a time when the academy was turning away from textual analysis, relatively little of that sort of analysis has been done on film. And there are hundreds of important movies about which nothing pointed has been written. This seems to me to be a problem.

Fully canvasing the terrain here—locating and listing all that has and has not been done and identifying all the gaps—would be the work of a lifetime, and clearly lies outside the scope of the present study. But while I can't in these pages fully quantify the problem, I can, I hope, by exploring a few examples, make some progress toward describing it.

The particular examples I have chosen for discussion in the next few chapters will, I imagine, strike as a little arbitrary, as indeed, to a certain extent, they are. But the very arbitrariness of the selection serves, I think, to corroborate my point, suggesting, as it does, that such lacunae might be found, well, almost anywhere one chose to look. Or, perhaps, the motley quality of the assemblage will provoke precisely the opposite effect—seeming to be a sign of my having cherry-picked evidence. On the one hand, I want to lay that potential suspicion to rest. When, in the course of imagining this project, I came to the conclusion that it might be useful to look at everything written in English on a few specific films and to chart, as exhaustively as I could, all the interpretive work that had been done in each case, the movies that first came to mind, more or less without prompting, were D. W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920), Marcel Carné's *Port of Shadows* (Le Quai des brumes, 1938), and Mike Nichols's *The Graduate* (1967). On the other hand, of course, the list is not purely random. The reason these three films sprang so readily to mind was that I had at one time or another taught them all and remembered having had some difficulty, in each case, finding good secondary materials to teach along with the films. The reasons I wound up including Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert* (Il deserto rosso, 1964) in the mix I lay out in some detail at the outset of Chap. 4. In any case, what I have, I think, is a random sample drawn from a non-random set. Both sample and set, I want to suggest, could be substantially enlarged; and while I cannot practicably discuss more than a few examples at length in this study, I can and do, in the pages that follow, point to a few more that could be offered into evidence. That

list, too, however, has to be (a nod, again, towards practicality) extremely partial—a mere suggestion of corroboration. My aim is not so much to provide dispositive proof for a point as to put enough pressure on the reader to consider conceding it.

A Note on Methodology

In Chaps. 2, 3, and 4, part of my aim is to catalog existing English-language scholarship on each of the films under consideration. In order to highlight the relative paucity of interpretive work that figures into the scholarship, I often use literary texts, and the writing that has developed around these texts, as points of comparison. With regard to the films about which I offer sustained discussion, my aim while doing the research was to be as exhaustive as possible in tracking down extant criticism. In each case, I used a number of indexes and resources (in all cases, I used the MLA Bibliography, JSTOR, Project Muse, WorldCat/OCLC FirstSearch, Amazon.com listings; whenever possible, I also used the Berkeley Film Bibliography; on occasion I used more specialized resources).[16] I've read everything I've found indexed or listed online; I've used that reading to discover articles, book chapters, and even whole books that weren't picked up by the indexes or other resources. The process was rather like trying to trace out the rhizomatic root structure of a plant; and it was time consuming—too time consuming to be workable in relation to the literary texts I wanted to put into play as points of contrast.

As will become clear, there is simply too much secondary material available on each of the literary texts to make reading all of it even remotely possible. For the literary texts, I relied on the indexes alone (using both the MLA Bibliography and WorldCat/OCLC FirstSearch), but I tried to be as patient and careful as possible in my work on these indexes—reading titles, attending to numbers of pages for each entry, in the case of the WorldCat listings using the tables of contents and abstracts the database provides. Where the literary texts are concerned, I indicate where my information came from. With the film texts, I will be making the assumption that I found close to everything written on the films in English—though no search of this sort can be counted upon to be complete (the indexes leave out a surprising amount of material and if a given work isn't cited by others it can remain hidden).

In the endnotes, I have included the dates of the database searches and the time-periods during which I worked through the more thorough

compiling of material. I have not tried to update these searches, since doing so would be an effectively endless endeavor, like painting the Golden Gate Bridge. So when I make claims about everything that has been written about a given film, the claim is valid (as far as I know) only for the time period during which the search was conducted.

Notes

1. I mean mainly to bracket questions concerning documentary, on the one hand, and experimental film, on the other, since both present special problems where meaning is concerned and their consideration would tend to muddy the waters.
2. William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned," *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947), p. 57.
3. Such observations clearly encode "meanings," but my students don't see—or frame—the points in terms of meaning. If they could somehow make the shift to seeing the elements of a film as being there by design, they might. What the observations could mean, if the students could make that switch, is that *All That Heaven Allows* is playing with and commenting on Hollywood conventions—and, in a deeper sense, on American cultural expectations about masculinity—by making Ron uncannily perfect as a fantasy lover; and that *Scarface* (1932) is endorsing a set of values in its presentation of Camonte.
4. Any serious engagement with theories of meaning would take me too far afield—would require the staking out of another field of operation entirely. And, finally, for the purposes of the argument that I am making in this book, it doesn't really matter where the meaning comes from. But I do feel obliged to state my position, however baldly. When I talk about the meaning of a work of art, I take a multi-layered intentionalist stance. That is, like many writers on the subject of meaning (Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels most famously), I see meaning as being necessarily (by definition) yoked to the idea of intention, so like them I wouldn't find meaning in a wave poem. But I wouldn't limit the notion to conscious intentions only. Any organized structure, I would argue, that can be said to have desires or aims and the capacity to express them can be said to have intentions. The unconscious has its own intentions—as do cultural formations. Meaning derives from the mix of conscious intentions, unconscious intentions that are personal and distinct (tied to specific individuals) and unconscious intentions that are broadly shared (cultural intentions that get expressed through many people living within a given cultural formation). A corpo-

rate work, like a film, doesn't make thinking in these terms impossible—just more complicated. For Knapp and Michaels's well-known early statement on the relation between intention and meaning, see their "Against Theory," *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982), pp. 11–30.

5. George Toles has a lovely essay on this issue. See his "Obvious Mysteries in *Fargo*," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 38.4 (1999), 627–64.
6. Very recently—say, over the course of the past two to four years—my students have become highly sensitive to material they see as sexist and/or racist. But, precisely because they do not know how to think of films as having positions or attitudes about what is being represented, they pretty regularly misconstrue what they see. Assuming always that what is being represented is being endorsed, they tend to consider as sexist any film that shows a man objectifying, committing violence against, or condescending to a woman, even in instances where the film is pretty clearly anatomizing or critiquing the man's behavior and values.
7. Archibald MacLeish, "Ars Poetica," *Collected Poems, 1917–1982* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), p. 107.
8. Anticipating later discussion, I want to note briefly in this context that I do see the value—in the case of literary studies—of pushing against what David Bordwell refers to dismissively as "making meaning." (See his *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.) An orientation toward meaning, after all, dominated literary studies for many decades. Thus it makes perfect sense that critics would want to focus on other attributes of the literary text: what it *does*, for example, rather than what it *says*, how it affects the reader, how those effects are physiologically or neurologically produced. My point here, and to some extent throughout is that the history of film studies is different from the history of literary studies.
9. See David A. Cook, "German Cinema of the Weimar Period, 1919–1929," *A History of Narrative Film*, 5th ed. (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 71–88; R. L. Rutsky, "The Mediation of Technology and Gender: *Metropolis*, Nazism, Modernism," *New German Critique: An Interdisciplinary Journal of German Studies* 60 (1993), 3–32; Judith Hess Wright, "Genre Films and the Status Quo," *Film Genre Reader, II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: U of Texas P, 1995), pp. 41–49; and Lucy Fischer, "Mama's Boy: Filial Hysteria in *White Heat*," *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 70–83.
10. One hundred fifty is a conservative estimate of the number of articles on Wharton's novel. A standard MLA database advanced search (on 8/21/15)

using keywords "Edith," "Wharton," "House," and "Mirth," and limiting the search to English-language texts, excluding dissertation abstracts and inactive websites turns up 262 listings. One hundred seventy of those focus centrally on the novel (as indicated by the fact that the title of the novel or the name of a character—Lily Bart or Lawrence Selden—appears in the title of the article or that the list of subject terms indicates the focus is exclusively *The House of Mirth*). The search lists three collections of essays devoted exclusively to discussion of *House of Mirth: Edith Wharton: The House of Mirth*, ed. Shari Benstock (New York: St. Martin's, 1993); *New Essays on* The House of Mirth, ed. Deborah Esch (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001); and *Edith Wharton's* The House of Mirth, ed. Carol J. Singley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). A basic search for works about Edith Wharton turns up more than 1500 entries, many of them referring to book-length examinations of Wharton's works that must include substantive discussions of *The House of Mirth*.

11. The commentary on these texts is so extensive that I won't attempt to document it except in summary terms. MLA database subject searches for John Milton, John Keats, Emily Dickinson, and T. S. Eliot produce, respectively, 8211, 2666, 2608, and 5210 entries. A keyword search using "Milton" and "Penseroso" produces ninety-five; one using "Keats" and "Nightingale" 129; "Dickinson" and "Gun" give 30; and "Eliot" and "Wasteland" forty-seven. Again, these searches (conducted 8/20/15) were limited to English and excluded dissertation abstracts and inactive websites. As I will have reason to say at various points subsequently, these preliminary, superficial searches for secondary material identify just the tip of the critical iceberg.
12. An MLA database keyword search for "Dickens" and "Chuzzlewit" produces 106 entries; one for "Henry," "James," and "Pupil" produces thirty-four; one for "Woolf" and "Jacob's" produces 118. (The searches were conducted in 8/21/15.)
13. Even in the case of these relatively well-discussed films, however, the numbers suggest significant imbalance in terms of what has been written about literary texts as compared to what has been written about film texts: The Berkeley Film Bibliography (as of 8/20/15) lists twenty entries for *Out of the Past* (though only fifteen deal centrally with the movie); the number is even lower for *Stagecoach*, with just twelve entries. Berkeley doesn't index work on either *Gilda* or *Shane*. An MLA search (8/20/15) for the former using the terms "Vidor" (as keyword) and "Gilda" (as name of work) yields thirteen entries. A similar search for *Shane* produces twenty.

    Ford's *The Searchers* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* provide interesting points of comparison. The Berkeley Bibliography lists fifty entries for the former

and eighty-five for the latter. This imbalance within film studies suggests to me, again, that only a small handful of films are attracting all the critical attention.

14. It had been my intent, when planning this book, to devote a chapter analyzing the kind of work published in film studies books from the late 50s through the early 70s. The chapter was imagined as a companion piece to the current chapter devoted to film journals. But it ultimately became clear that such as study would require more space than I could allot it here. I base the generalizations I make in this paragraph on my preliminary research: I think that, given adequate space and time, I could make persuasive the claim that books about film from the 60s and early 70s produced *relatively* little really trenchant interpretation—which is to say, not none, but not a lot either.
15. This is a point I return to, and discuss more fully, in subsequent chapters.
16. In tracking down material on Marcel Carné, for example, I was helped by The Cinématéque Française's "Selective and Annotated Bibliography: Marcel Carné" that I found online at http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CEcQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cinematheque.fr%2Fdata%2Fdocument%2Fbibliography-marcel-carne.pdf&ei=KfKoU7b0F8ecyASfk4KoCQ&usg=AFQjCNFOEMLNLycRMrdB6uFM5MM4-NwbOA&bvm=bv.69620078,d.aWw in January 2014 but which seems no longer to be available.

PART I

The Difference a Reading Makes: Interpretation as Absent Center

CHAPTER 2

Forms of Critical Neglect: The Cases of Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920) and Carné's *Port of Shadows* (Le Quai des brumes, 1938)

My aim in this chapter is neither to analyze the two films that are the focus of the discussion, nor to respond at any length to the body of critical work, such as it is, that has developed around them. In Chaps. 7 and 8, I offer extended readings of individual movies. In Chaps. 3 and 4 I not only catalog extant scholarship on two well-known films, as I do here, but put myself into dialogue with that scholarship, offering detailed commentary and playing out alternative positions on what seem to me critical points. My goal here, more simply, is to try to identify, in relation to each film, the contours of an absence, one that seems to me common in film studies as a discipline.

Way Down East

Way Down East is by any measure, any manner of reckoning, an important movie. Just for starters, it is one of the most financially successful films produced by one of cinema's most influential directors. Griffith's filmography is pock-marked by failures of various sorts—both artistic and ethical: failures of vision, of subtlety, of sensibility, of sympathetic imagination. His films are sometimes offensive, by fits and starts silly, at points even painful to watch. But his centrality to the history of cinema is clear. And *Way Down East* is actually, despite some faults, a very good film—complicated, conflicted, and engaging. As its box office take attests, it's an affecting and effective melodrama, and even without its extraordinary concluding

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_2

sequence, it would be an accomplished cinematic production, a noteworthy achievement in the history of American movie making. One recent study, in fact, flatly calls it "Griffith's strongest film."[1] A work of comparable ambition and attainment by a figure of comparable significance in the field of literature, even if the figure were as controversial as Griffith, would, of a certainty, trail behind it a substantial body of critical commentary, much of it interpretive in orientation.

Take just one example, T. S. Eliot's "Gerontion," a poem published the same year *Way Down East* was released. Obviously enough, Eliot is important to the fields of both American and British literature (though not as central to either, I would argue, as Griffith is to film studies). Just as obviously, "Gerontion" is not his most significant contribution to literary history—in the same manner that *Way Down East* is not really defining for Griffith. And although it is hard to imagine two more dissimilar sensibilities, Eliot is, like Griffith, a polarizing figure—and for some of the same reasons: he is aligned with a troubling political and cultural conservatism and some of his work is patently racist. One imagines Eliot reeling from the comparison, but it is not, I think, inappropriate.

A straightforward search of the MLA Bibliography using "Eliot" as a subject term and "Gerontion" as a keyword turns up seventy listings.[2] Somewhat short of half of these (thirty-two by my count) cannot be considered substantive: they are notes or brief explications; or they make passing reference to "Gerontion" in the course of discussing something else. That still leaves thirty-eight essays that discuss "Gerontion" at length, with twenty-six devoted in their entirety to its analysis. In addition, there are, according to WorldCat, forty-three books on Eliot that include substantial discussion of the poem: a number of these (seventeen by my count) allocate only parts of chapters to the study of "Gerontion" (typically pairing that with analysis of one or two other texts, usually *The Waste Land*), but significantly more than half (twenty-six) reserve whole chapters to the elucidation of the one text; and three books—including a casebook on "Gerontion" comprised of thirteen essays—allot *multiple* chapters to its examination. All of this commentary together amounts to more than a thousand pages of close consideration—most of it interpretive—of this single work of literature.

Way Down East, by comparison, has been the focus of relatively little sustained critical attention. At the time of this writing,[3] there have been just three journal articles published on the film (excluding one- or two-page notes, mostly of a journalistic nature, and brief reviews of DVD

versions of the movie).[4] To be sure, there are also eighteen books that include chapters or parts of chapters on *Way Down East*, but more than half of these (ten of the eighteen) are biographies of Griffith or biographically inflected accounts of his work and the sections of the books that deal with *Way Down East* don't analyze the film in any meaningful sense; rather, they offer variously focused histories of its production.[5] Four of the eleven remaining texts (the three articles and the other eight chapters or parts of chapters), are geared toward purposes other than interpretation: two are devoted exclusively to arguing for the influence of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* on Griffith's movie[6]; one considers Lilian Gish's performance style as a moment in the history of the cinema[7]; and one chronicles the transformation of the narrative from its origin in Lottie Blair Parker's play, through its revision and subsequent novelization by Joseph R. Grismer, to its adaptation for the screen, first by Anthony Paul Kelly and later by Griffith himself.[8] The remaining seven texts do offer—in various ways, and at varying lengths and levels of detail—readings of *Way Down East*. But in the case of five of the seven, "reading" the film isn't the essay's primary concern: one sees the movie as forming a kind of cultural knot, tying together a variety of historical discourses on maternity, the emphasis in the essay falling on those discourses, the cultural matrix that the film helps make visible, rather than on the film itself as artifact[9]; another presents *Way Down East* as representing one of two "only *apparently* contrasting elements" whose "interconnection … defines the form" of film melodrama, the focus here being, again, not the analysis of the film, but the identification and description of what the author takes to be the constituent features of a genre (Flitterman-Lewis, 3); and one situates the movie in the context of an ongoing cultural discourse on the relative values of leisure and labor, especially domestic labor, particularly as that discourse relates to the leisure activity of going to the movies, the film serving to exemplify Griffith's struggle to negotiate between his desire to use his films to shore up Victorian values and his sense of the cinema as participating in an emerging consumer culture in many ways antithetical to those values[10]; the remaining two—both of which embed consideration of *Way Down East* in longer, more general analysis, and in the form of a section of a book chapter set apart from the rest of the essay—use Griffith's film as a case study for illustrating a point about the history or historical understanding of melodrama as a form or mode.[11]

Obviously enough, there's nothing wrong with using *Way Down East* the ways these works do. Indeed, the ideology critique, the efforts at

historical understanding, the illumination of genre all seem important; I certainly wouldn't want to be seen as suggesting that the critics whose work is outlined above should have directed their attention elsewhere. My point is simply that, to date, very little interpretive work has been done on this important film. Just two texts, a single journal article and one section of one chapter in one book, have made reading *Way Down East* their primary concern.[12] Two.

Granted, of course, that some sustained interpretive consideration of *Way Down East* does appear in two of the three texts that take the film as case study[13]: in fact, analysis of the movie in these two chapters is as substantive, if not quite as extended, as it is in the essays whose focus is interpreting the movie.

Perhaps that seems enough. Perhaps, indeed, four earnest critical engagements with one film seem like a lot. But as one who began his academic career writing on *William Faulkner* and *Toni Morrison*, I must say that, to me, four essays on an important work by an historically important artist don't feel like a lot. In the context of the kind of reading I was doing on Morrison and Faulkner, four essays feel to me, in fact, like next to nothing. *Way Down East* is a long, complicated, and ideologically conflicted text. It seems to me demonstrable that all the interpretive work done on the movie has yet to come close to canvasing the available terrain.

Again, my point is not that extant criticism on the film is misguided or shallow. My point is just that more could be said—that more, in fact, *needs* to be said. Three of the four extended interpretations of *Way Down East*—just by way of brief illustration—present variously inflected versions of the same basic "take" on the movie: *Way Down East* reflects Griffith's Victorian sensibilities and endorses the patriarchal values and culture it portrays as victimizing and traumatizing its heroine. Both Robert Lang and Linda Williams see the film as, to some extent, troubled by its commitment to patriarchy and sensitive to the suffering the system exacts of its main character. But both argue that *Way Down East* is unable, really, to question that system. Lang puts the point most succinctly: "Griffith laments the disasters he represents, but can only recommend a more careful adherence to the patriarchy" (70).[14] Virginia Wright Wexman sees the tensions that Lang and Williams address as something of a dodge, arguing for a more uniformly anti-feminist conception of the film. That is, the surface sympathy *Way Down East* extends to women actually serves as cover for animosity: Griffith's "emphasis on female suffering … implicitly expressed the rage he harbored against the women he explicitly idealized" (53).

All three of these texts add to our understanding of *Way Down East* as artifact; they help place it historically; they illuminate its relation to melodrama as a form. Still, however, the uniformity of the basic position offered by all three opens a space for qualification, at least, if not counter-argument, a space that remains to be filled. Surely it would be possible, that is, to make a case that the conflicts all three writers recognize (in one way or other) to be part of the film text do finally amount to a challenge to patriarchal culture; that the sympathy for Anna *Way Down East* generates in the viewer (the emotional content, after all, of the film *as* melodrama) serves to sensitize that viewer to systemic problems, since what is victimizing Anna, as both Lang and Williams in various ways acknowledge, is not an individual but a system. No one, I think, would want to argue that *Way Down East* functions as a thoroughgoing critique of patriarchal values. But it is easy enough to imagine someone doing with this film what Tania Modleski in the 80s did with Hitchcock's work—that is, to see in the focus on female suffering not only a means of registering and negotiating fear and anxiety, not just an expression of hostility, though, at some level, it is certainly that, but also an indication of sympathetic identification, a fascination with femininity, on the part of the male filmmaker, that contains both positive and negative aspects; and to see the work, not as offering a feminist critique, but, by focusing so resolutely on problems produced for women by a cultural formation constructed by and for men, as providing a pretext and context for the production of such a critique.[15]

A reading of *Way Down East* of this sort would not, of course, constitute the final word on the film, but it would be a dialectical step forward: it would complicate, enrich, and deepen our sense of Griffith's movie. It would put before viewers competing ways of making sense of textual elements—the principal male character's alignment, for example, with femininity (his associations with nature, on the one hand, and art on the other; his marked connections to his mother) which might be seen, as Wexman has suggested, as a form of "masculine appropriation" (59), but might just as well be thought to bear witness to some anxiety concerning conventional masculinity and a desire to imagine an alternative. The reading would also as a matter of course—assuming for the moment the existence of a world in which people were regularly doing readings of films—generate resistance, counter-argument, further movement into, and further critical assimilation of, the text, which would, again as a matter of course, get fuller and denser as a consequence of the dialectical play of competing readings.

And there are surely issues raised by *Way Down East* that fall outside the scope of its representation of gender. The fourth of the sustained examinations of the movie that I mention above—a section in a chapter of Michael Allen's *Family Secrets: The Feature Films of D. W. Griffith*—focuses primarily on character development, the recognition trajectories traced by most of the film's main characters.[16] The essay seems to me too mechanical in its application of Aristotelian terminology to the playing out of the movie's plots, and muddied by bits of structuralist analysis that don't consistently pay off in terms of illuminating the film text, but it does have interesting things to say about the ways Griffith's camerawork incorporates the viewer into the film, the ways it works to make the viewer complicit in the action. One can imagine any number of other points of address: the theme of intolerance, for example, which was an abiding concern of Griffith's, on the one hand, and a register, on the other, of his anxieties over—and of his efforts to manage—his public image; or the way the film's evocation of nineteenth-century American landscape painting figures into its exploration of the relation between nature and art. The point here, again, is simply that this work is not being done.

Port of Shadows

Marcel Carné's *Port of Shadows* is one of a handful of films that defines Poetic Realism, a mode or style of filmmaking central to what is generally considered the "Golden Age" of French cinema. Both the film and the mode are historically important—and not just because *Port of Shadows* was once blamed for France's quick defeat by Germany at the outset of World War II (though that surely counts).[17] As Edward Baron Turk has argued, *Port of Shadows* "is perhaps the most incisive cinematic expression of the 'psychology' of France in the late 1930s" (98). The picture possesses, that is, real historical resonance. Moreover, it was popular at the time of its release and, although controversial, critically well received. It contains one of the iconic images of world cinema—the famous shot of Jean Gabin as Jean and Michèle Morgan as Nelly looking pensively into the distance through the back window of Panama's shack, each character fragmented and framed in isolation by the unsymmetrical panes of glass, thus succinctly evoking in a single filmic moment the air of resigned alienation and dreamy longing that served as Poetic Realism's signature tone (Image 2.1).

For all that, *Port of Shadows* has received limited critical attention; and analyses of the film in English are next to non-existent. If the critical

Image 2.1 Framing alienation and longing

terrain surrounding *Way Down East* seems a little arid, that surrounding *Port of Shadows* is positively barren, "a rocky place" where criticism can seem to "find no purchase."

A great many texts, to be sure, *mention* Carné and *Port of Shadows* in the course of relating variously configured histories of the cinema—because, again, both film and filmmaker are historically important. But the treatment of both in all these histories is designedly superficial—ranging from a few phrases scattered here and there to a handful of consecutive paragraphs. At the time of this writing,[18] there are five books in English that include chapters that contain sections offering some sustained attention to the movie: Edward Baron Turk's *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carné and the Golden Age of French Cinema*; Claire Blakeway's *Jacques Prévert: Popular French Theater and Cinema*; Dudley Andrew's *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*; David I. Grossvogel's *Marianne and the Puritan: Transformations of the Couple in French and American Films*; and Jonathan Driskell's *Marcel Carné*.[19] Four of the five

are oriented toward historical overview (of Carné's pre-War career in the case of Andrew and Driskell; of his collaboration with Prévert on the films most closely associated with Poetic Realism in the case of Blakeway; of the ambiguous social and political climate that the film evoked in the case of Grossvogel), with the commentary on *Port of Shadows*, in each instance, comprising only a small part of a chapter or chapter section. All four make engaging observations about the film, and all contain gestures at interpretation. But the overview format doesn't lend itself to really close analysis and in all cases the discussion presents itself as summary, a cataloguing of discrete elements: in the seven-and-a-half pages (of a forty-eight page chapter on "Poetic Realism") that Driskell accords to *Port of Shadows*, for example, he describes the film's origins and the circumstances of its production, summarizes the plot, identifies the ways it exemplifies Carné's brand of Poetic Realism, pausing to consider the film's bleakness; he then examines the love theme as a counterpoint to the pessimism and ends with a consideration of the movie's politics, particularly its gender politics. Because this chapter section, like the other overviews, doesn't pursue a particular thesis about the movie (the chapter section's main aim, like the others, is not to interpret but to inform), the analysis, wholly unobjectionable, lacks edge—precisely because it is unobjectionable. Aside from the aesthetic judgments that punctuate and to some extent structure Blakeway's consideration of *Port of Shadows* (one sub-section heading reads "Carné's Mise En Scene: Strengths, Weaknesses, and the Rôle of Décor"), evaluative gestures whose formulation and focus strike as old-fashioned and rather beside the point, these works don't give the reader much to react to, to push against. By their nature, they can't initiate the kind of dialectical movement that makes interpretation matter.

In contrast to these four works, Turk's *Child of Paradise* devotes the entirety of a chapter to *Port of Shadows.* Unlike the other four studies, as well, Turk's discussion of the film is thesis driven. And yet, because the thesis the essay pursues is so broadly pitched—as the quote from the book above suggests, Turk argues that *Port of Shadows* presents the contemporary viewer with something like a snapshot (if, given the context, such a figure can be allowed) of French national consciousness at a particular moment in time—analysis of *Port of Shadows* in *Child of Paradise* has the same desultory, sort of summary feel to it as it does in the other essays. The chapter is informative, the observations it contains often acute. Indeed Turk's book would surely be necessary reading for anyone pretending to scholarly interest in either *Port of Shadows* or Marcel Carné. Still, like the

less comprehensive examinations of the film I have already mentioned, the chapter on "Poetic Realism" in *Child of Paradise* has, from the perspective of someone with a background in literary studies, the feel of the preliminary, of the kind of general, ground-clearing scholarship done early in a particular field in order to provide a base for later more focused work.

The problem in the case of *Port of Shadows*, of course, is that nothing much has been built on the foundation provided by Turk and the others. In addition to the five chapters or chapter sections that deal with *Port of Shadows*, there are at present just four journal articles that address the film at any length, none of which focuses exclusively on the movie, and only one of which offers sustained interpretation. John Martin's "*Foutre le camp au Venezuela*: The *Il Grido* French Connection" traces the influence of French film generally, and of *Port of Shadows* particularly, on Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il Grido* (1957). The essay notes similarities between the Carné and Antonioni movies, but doesn't analyze either one.[20] Jonathan Driskell's "The Female 'Metaphysical' Body in Poetic Realist Film" considers the complex and conflicted ways Michèle Morgan's body—her physical presence—signifies in the Poetic Realist movies in which she appears, paying special attention to Jean Grimillon's *Remorques* (1941) and treating *Port of Shadows* in passing.[21] Ben McCann's "(Under) scoring Poetic Realism: Maurice Jaubert and 1930s' French Cinema" examines "the way," as the article abstract has it, "Jaubert's scores provide an important synthesis between image and sound" in three Poetic Realist films—Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* (1934) and Carné's *Port of Shadows* and L*e Jour se leve* (1939)—the focus here being rhetorical effect, not meaning.[22] Thus there exists at present only one essay in English that offers a reading of Carné's *Port of Shadows*—Susan Weiner's "When a Prostitute Becomes an Orphan: Pierre Mac Orlan's *Le Quai des brumes* (1927) in the Service of Poetic Realism."[23] And even then the article's attention is split between the movie and the novel from which it is adapted. Another way of putting this would be to say, more pointedly, that despite Marcel Carné's significance as a filmmaker, and despite the centrality of *Port of Shadows* to his oeuvre, there is not a single text written in English—in either a book or a journal—whose main aim is to interpret the film.[24] As in, not one. As in, zero.

It might be objected at this point that the critical neglect of Carné's work is well known to film studies—a phenomenon that has been acknowledged by many writers—and that this neglect should thus be seen, not as marking the field—that is, as setting it apart in some way from literary

studies—but as being a part *of* the field, as belonging to film studies proper. In other words, the discipline itself has laid out the reasons so few critics attend to Carné. First, of course, there is the political muddiness of his career—for, despite solid pre-War leftist credentials, Carné opted, in contrast principally to Jean Renoir, to continue working in France during the Occupation. And the whiff of collaboration has been in some sense disqualifying. "We have to talk about Poetic Realism"—so the logic might go—"but talking about Carné, for all his centrality to the movement, might prove distasteful, and there are plenty of ways we can cover the main concerns without getting bogged down in defensiveness about our choices. Renoir, in any case, is the better, more important director." Second, there is the felt perception that Francois Truffaut's attacks on the "tradition of quality" in general and on Carné in particular effectively buried both. Criticism, in other words, has resigned itself to abandoning Carné to the oblivion into which he was cast by the New Wave.[25]

By way of rebuttal to the first point, I will only point out that a quick search of the MLA Bibliography for criticism on Céline's *Journey to the End of Night*,[26] a book produced by a virulent and vocal anti-Semite and unapologetic Nazi collaborator, turns up fifty-three entries in English, many if not most of which identify texts that offer interpretation of the novel. As for the New Wave's response to Carné: T. S. Eliot's critique of Wordsworth didn't, I would note, put a period to interpretations of "Tintern Abbey."[27]

Again, as with the discussion of the scholarship on *Way Down East*, the point of all this is not to find fault with what little has been done on *Port of Shadows*. The point, rather, is to make the case that what has been done is in fact too little—to argue that a particular kind of work has been neglected. What is exciting about Weiner's article—whose main aim is to suggest that, in recasting Mac Orlan's prostitute Nelly as an orphan, Carné produces an image of monstrous innocence whose "unfamiliar sexual identity" (133) and "ambiguous femininity" (139) register as threatening and thus call out for containment (that the movie is, in fact, more reactionary than the reactionary novel from which it was drawn)—aside from the essay's narrower focus, which allows the analysis to move past the self-evident to an illuminating level of specificity, is that, in making a specific claim about meaning, it forces the reader to re-think the film, in some sense to re-view it. Argument, which calls for evaluation, incites critical awareness, awakens imagination. Most of the critics who have written on *Port of Shadows* note the androgynous quality of the Nelly character. But

how, finally, is such ambiguity meant to be understood? How would we know? What would count as evidence? These are the kinds of questions that Weiner's article puts into play. And the film provides room for varying response, for a dialectical shift, for example, from seeing Nelly simply as innocent to seeing her innocence as a danger (Weiner's view)—to seeing the danger as being a consequence, not of Nelly's ambiguity or her innocence, but of the way she is perceived, the way men insist on seeing her. *Port of Shadows* might be re-thought, then, as an analysis of the male-dominated world through which women like Nelly are forced to somehow navigate. Such a case, in rejoinder to Weiner's essay, might—and this is really all I'm saying—well be worth the making.

Notes

1. David Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D. W. Griffith and the American Theater* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2009), p. 186.
2. April 2014.
3. April 2014.
4. The three articles are: Sarah R. Kozloff, "Where Essex Meets New England: Griffith's *Way Down East* and Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 13.1 (1985), 35–41; Virginia Wright Wexman, "Suffering and Suffrage: Birth, the Female Body, and Women's Choices in D. W. Griffith's *Way Down East*," *The Velvet Light Trap* 29 (1992), 53–65, hereafter cited in text.; and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "The Blossom and the Bole," *Cinema Journal* 33.3 (1994), 3–15, hereafter cited in text.
5. I won't catalog the many books that make passing reference—a sentence here or there—to *Way Down East*. The ten texts that focus on biography or production history in their treatment of the film are: Lillian Gish with Ann Pinchot, *Lilian Gish: The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1969); Paul O'Dell, *Griffith and the Rise of Hollywood* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1970); Robert M. Henderson, *D. W. Griffith: His Life and Work* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972); Edward Wagenknecht and Anthony Slide, *The Films of D. W. Griffith* (New York: Crown, 1975); Leona Rasmussen Phillips, *D. W. Griffith: Titan of the Film Art* (New York: Gordon Press, 1976); William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978); Martin T. Williams, *Griffith: First Artist of the Movies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980); Richard Schickel, *D. W. Griffith: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); Richard Schickel, "*Way Down East:* Finances and Responses," *The First Filmmakers*, ed. Richard Dyer MacCann (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1989), 202–10; and Richard Koszarski,

Hollywood on the Hudson: Film and Television in New York from Griffith to Sarnoff (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2008).

6. See Kozloff, n. 17; and Peter Widdowson, "The Silent Era: Thomas Hardy Goes Way Down East," *Thomas Hardy on Screen*, ed. T. R. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 50–62.
7. See Paula Marantz Cohen, "Griffith, Gish, and the Narrative of the Face," *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), pp. 107–30.
8. See Mayer, "*Way Down East*," *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, pp. 186–216. This essay does contain brief passages of interpretive commentary in isolated paragraphs and paragraph sequences, but the fragmentary analysis doesn't amount to a reading of the film and is buried by the historical documentation of the movie's origins. It's engaging reading but the focus is historical, not interpretive.
9. See Lucy Fischer, "Silent Melodrama: *Way Down East:* Melodrama, Metaphor, and the Maternal Body," *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), pp. 56–72.
10. See Kathleen Ann McHugh, "Silent Film, Silent Work: Early Cinema and the Domestic Melodramas of D. W. Griffith," *American Domesticity: From How-to Manual to Hollywood Melodrama* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 81–107. This, too, is a compelling essay. And to the extent that McHugh does read the film, the reading is smart, insightful, and thought provoking. But that reading takes up only five and a half of the essay's 25 pages. The interests of the discussion lie elsewhere, mainly in the cultural discourse in which Griffith's films are seen to participate.
11. See Robert Lang, "The Victorian Heritage: *Way Down East*," *American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli* (Princeton: Princeton UP), pp. 65–78, hereafter cited in text; and Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998), pp. 42–88.
12. The journal article is the one by Wexman. The section of a chapter is Michael Allen, "Let S/he Who is without Sin: *Way Down East* (1920)," *Family Secrets: The Feature Films of D. W. Griffith* (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 151–70.
13. That is, the essays by Lang and Williams.
14. Williams—whose account is more nuanced, more attentive to the tensions in the text (and thus, for my money, the best of the four substantive readings of the film) puts the point as follows: "When David saves Anna from the icy river and waterfall, he also saves the system that has so harshly expelled her. He tempers his father's law with his mother's love, saving the patriarchal family from casting out the maternal figure of love capable of tempering its stern law … The happy-ending resolution of this conflict,"

the conflict that arises "when a 'good' man condemns, according to his code of ethics, a 'good' woman," "reconcile[s] a maternal empathy that feels for Anna with the stern, paternal law that cannot, within the limits of conventional ideology, be fundamentally challenged" (75).

15. See Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1988).
16. See n. 12 for the Allen citation.
17. Charles O'Brien, "Film Noir in France before the Liberation," *Iris* 21 (1996), 7–20, discusses the political response to *Port of Shadows* and other French films noirs from the 30s at length, but most people who have discussed the movie also refer to the fact that the Vichy government placed blame on *Port of Shadows* and other cultural productions like it for France's quick collapse in the face of German aggression. See also, e.g., Edward Baron Turk, *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carné and the Golden Age of French Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989), esp. 96–128, hereafter cited in text; and Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), esp. 266–71; and Susan Weiner, "When a Prostitute Becomes an Orphan: Pierre Mac Orlan's *Le Quai des brumes* (1927) in the Service of Poetic Realism," *Studies in French Cinema* 6.2 (2006), 129–40, esp. the opening pages, hereafter cited in text.
18. As of February, 2014.
19. See Turk, *Child of Paradise*; Claire Blakeway, *Jacques Prévert and Popular French Theater and Cinema* (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1990); Andrew, *Mists of Regret*; David I. Grossvogel's *Marianne and the Puritan: Transformations of the Couple in French and American Films* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005); and Jonathan Driskell, *Marcel Carné* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2012).
20. See John Martin, "*Foutre le camp au Venezuela*: The *Il grido* French Connection," *Film Criticism* 9.1 (1984), 38–46.
21. See Jonathan Driskell, "The Female 'Metaphysical' Body in Poetic Realist Film," *Studies in French Cinema* 8.1 (2008), 57–73.
22. See Ben McCann, "'(Under)scoring Poetic Realism': Maurice Jaubert and 1930s' French Cinema," *Studies in French Cinema* 9.1 (2009), 37–47. The quote from the abstract is on p. 37.
23. See Weiner, who offers the most compelling commentary on the film—not just because it is exceptionally well written but because it pursues a well-defined idea. That is, unlike everything else written about *Port of Shadows*, Weiner's article presents itself as a reading of the film.
24. It is worth noting that, although a couple Carné films—*Le Jour se lève* (1939) and *Children of Paradise* (Les Enfants du paradis, 1945)—fare better than *Port of Shadows* in terms of the critical attention they've attracted,

a couple others of real significance—*Hôtel du Nord* (1938) and *Gates of the Night* (Les Portes de la nuit, 1946)—have fared far worse. For the purposes of the following comparisons, I've used three indexes (accessed in August 2015): the MLA Bibliography, the Berkeley Film Bibliographies, and WorldCat/OCLC FirstSearch. I've limited the searches of the databases to English and used both English and French variants of keywords (thus, both "paradis" and "paradise"; both "night" and "nuit"). I've left off references to reviews and interviews.

Children of Paradise, the most extensively studied of Carné's films, has been the focus of one short monograph, four journal articles (though one of these—see the listing for Alstadt below—is really just note-length), and seven chapters or chapter sections in books (four of which come from Turk's *Child of Paradise*). *Children of Paradise* gets more tangential treatment in three other texts. (I should also note, parenthetically, that Driskell's Marcel Carné also devotes considerable attention to the film but Driskell's book doesn't get picked up by any of the indexes.)

Le Jour se lève has also been the focus of one book. To date, however, the indexes I looked at list only one essay in English—a book chapter—that centers around discussion of the film. The movie is addressed, more or less briefly, in five journal articles whose focus lies elsewhere. As with Driskell's discussion of *Children of Paradise*, his analysis of *Le Jour se lève* (in a section—pp. 45–52—of a chapter devoted to "Poetic Realism") doesn't get indexed. Neither does the chapter in Turk's *Child of Paradise* (entitled "Strange Defeat," pp. 152–76).

The three indexes listed above produce just one entry for a journal article dealing with *Hôtel du Nord*, and that article's main concern is historiography, not Carné's movie, which gets addressed directly only in the concluding three pages of the essay. There are no other listings in these indexes, though, again, both Driskell and Turk discuss *Hôtel du Nord* (Driskell in a section—pp. 37–45—of the chapter on "Poetic Realism"; Turk in a chapter—entitled "Atmosphere, Atmosphere"—that focuses on the movie, pp. 129–51).

Only one entry—for a journal article—turns up for *Port of Shadows* as well. Both Driskell and Turk attend to the film, the former in a section—pp. 80–87—of a chapter entitled "The Second World War and Its Aftermath," the latter in a chapter entitled "In the Afterglow of Triumph," 347–61.

For *Children of Paradise*:

The book:

Jill Forbes, *Les Enfants du paradis* (London: BFI, 1997).

The journal articles:

Mirella Jona Affron, "*Les Enfants du paradis*: Play of Genres," *Cinema Journal* 18.1 (1978), 45–52; Edward Baron Turk, "The Birth of the Children of Paradise," *American Film* 4 (1979), 42–49; and David Alstadt, "Arletty, Star Image, and the Return of the Gaze: Gazing Back from Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du paradis*," West Virginia University Philological Papers 48 (2001–2002), 67–70; and Douglas Lanier, "L'Homme Blanc et L'Homme Noir: *Othello* in *Les Enfants du paradis*," in *Shakespeare in Performance*, ed. Eric C. Brown and Estelle Rivier (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 171–80.

The book chapters or chapter sections:

James Reid Paris, "*Les Enfants du paradis*," *The Great French Films* (Secaucus: Citadel, 1983), 103–10; Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "Beneath the Despair, the Show Must Go On: Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du paradis*," *French Films: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau (London: Routledge, 1989), 78–88; Turk, "The Design of *Children of Paradise*," *Child of Paradise*, 219–44; Turk, "Politics and Theater in *Children of Paradise*," *Child of Paradise*, 245–267; Turk, "Androgyny, Masochism, and *Children of Paradise*," *Child of Paradise*, 268–301; and Turk, "Primal Scenes from *Children of Paradise*," *Child of Paradise*, 302–46; and Ben McCann, "*Les Enfants du paradis/Children of Paradise*," *The Cinema of France*, ed. Phil Powrie and Michel Marie (London: Wallflower, 2006), 51–59.

The more tangential discussions:

Dudley Andrew, "Poetic Realism: Melodrama and the Problem of Identification," Purdue University Seventh Annual Conference on Film, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Thomas P. Adler (West Lafayette, 1983), 240–47; Russell Ganim, "Prévert Reads Shakespeare: Lacenaire as Iago in *Les Enfants du paradis*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 38.1 (2001), 46–67; and Laura Mulvey, "Jill Forbes's *Les Enfants du paradis*," *French Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2003), 278–87.

For *Le Jour se lève:*

The book:

Ben McCann, *Le Jour se lève* (London: I. b. Tauris, 2014).

The essay that focuses on the movie:

Maureen Turim, "Poetic Realism as Psychoanalytic and Ideological Operation: Marcel Carné's *Le Jour se lève*," *French Films: Texts and Contexts*, 63–77.

The more tangential discussions:

Ines Hedges, "Form and Meaning in French Film, I: Time and Space," *French Review: Journal of American Association of Teachers of French* 54.1 (1980), 28–36; Andrew, "Poetic Realism: Melodrama and the

Problem of Identification"; Ben McCann, "'A Discreet Character?' Action Spaces and Architectural Specificity in French Poetic Realist Cinema," *Screen* 45.4 (2004), 375–82; Dai Vaughn, "Three Exercises in Film Symmetry: Marcel Carné and Filmic Formalities," *Vertigo* 4.1 (2008), n.p.; McCann, "(Under)scoring Poetic Realism."

For *Hôtel du Nord*:

The essay:

Steven Ungar, "'Atmosphère, atmosphère': On the Study of France between the Wars," *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 21.2 (1997), 381–97.

For *Gates of the Night*:

The essay:

Robert Phillip Kolker, "Carné's *Les Portes de la nuit* and the Sleep of French Cinema," *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 7.1 (1987), 46–59.

One is tempted to say, given the above, that it is as if the work on *Children of Paradise* and *Le Jour se lève* sucked all the air out of the critical environment, allowing no other sparks to ignite—except that there is so little air to begin with. The situation with Carné seems to me symptomatic. As I note elsewhere, critics tend to concentrate on one or two texts in a given field (however that field is defined: by director, by genre, by historical moment) and to ignore everything else.

25. For Truffaut's famous dismissal of the "Tradition of Quality," see François Truffaut, "Une certain tendence du cinéma français," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 31 (1954), 15–29. Truffaut doesn't really attack Carné in the essay. Mostly Truffaut ignores Carné. But Truffaut does seem to attribute the value of Carné's collaborations with Prévert to Prévert, and the assumed ascendancy of the scriptwriter in these collaborations cuts against the grain of his call for a director-oriented cinema. Truffaut, moreover, had been raking Carné over the coals in reviews of recent films. The codified view of this history is perhaps best summarized in an obituary that appeared in *The Independent*:

> During the Fifties the revisionist young iconoclasts of the influential journal *Cahiers du Cinema* (who were later to become the leading filmmakers of the New Wave) claimed that these had been the creations less of Carne himself than of his scenarist, the poet of populist Surrealism, Jacques Prevert. That they were not truly realised films d'auteur, the inner visions of an artist transferred directly on to celluloid, but mere illustrations, however brilliant, of another man's scripts. That the iconography of "poetic realism"—a pungent iconography of (studio-recre-

ated) working-class neighbourhoods, of sad rainswept cobblestones, of leather-coated, cloche-hatted "ladies of the night", of deserters, Legionnaires and petty criminals, of the inarticulate amour fou of the proletariat—was essentially a middle-class mystification, synthetic and depoliticised.

And when the polemic surrounding his career finally ebbed into silence and indifference, instead of emerging afresh from the Purgatory to which he had been unceremoniously consigned, Carne vanished into a limbo of almost total neglect.

See Gilbret Adair and Mike Goodridge, "Obituary: Marcel Carne," *The Independent*, 1 Nov. 1996. Online at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-marcel-carne-1350140.html.

One other reason that might be cited for the neglect of *Port of Shadows* is the potential anti-Semitism in the portrait of Zabel. But the anti-Semitism has actually enabled about half of the writing on the film (Turk, Andrew, and Grossvogel all address the issue). In other words, the question of anti-Semitism has actually helped stimulate readings, since the potential presence of anti-Semitism allows for looking at the film as kind of cultural snapshot or maybe even diagnosis.

26. Conducted June 2014.
27. See T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), pp. 37–44.

CHAPTER 3

Making the Future "Different": The Politics of Nichols's *The Graduate* (1967)

It would be difficult to imagine finding a film with significantly more cultural resonance than *The Graduate*. At the time of its release, not only was the movie enormously popular (the third-highest grossing picture, at that time, in the history of the cinema),[1] but its popularity was clearly a consequence, and index, of its perceived cultural relevance—mainly for the young, who made up an estimated ninety-six percent of the film's initial audience.[2] Contemporary commentators repeatedly stressed *The Graduate*'s newness and youth appeal, its connection to the moment: "From a window of my apartment I have a view of a movie house on Manhattan's East Side," begins an essay written by Hollis Alpert for *Saturday Review* well into the film's first run, "where, ever since last December, *The Graduate* has attracted long lines of patrons. During some of the coldest winter weekends, the lines extended around the corner all the way down the block, much like those at the Radio City Music during holiday periods—except that the people waiting for the next showing were not family groups but mostly young people in their teens and early twenties. One night when it was eight degrees outside I passed the line and noticed how little they seemed to be bothered by the weather; they stomped their feet, they made cheerful chatter; it was as though they all knew they were going to see something good, something made for *them*. There were other cinemas nearby, but no one waited outside in the cold. *The Graduate* was the film to see."[3] The same sentiment—concerning the film's contemporaneity—marked Stanley Kauffman's exuberantly

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_3

laudatory review: "*The Graduate* gives substance to the contention that American films are coming of age—of our age." For Kauffman, who, like Alpert, saw the film's iconoclasm as much in terms of its efforts at revising Hollywood cinematic conventions as in its resistance to conventional morality, *The Graduate* constituted "a milestone in American film history."[4]

That kind of praise, along with *The Graduate*'s exceptional popularity, spawned what J. W. Whitehead, in his recent monograph on the movie, refers to as "backlash" reviews: sundry refusals to see *The Graduate* as innovative, or as irreverent (let alone radical), or even as especially contemporary (with a couple of critics insisting that the youths it represented were of a distinctly earlier era).[5] But the backlash, too, in its intensity and earnestness, serves to measure *The Graduate*'s impact. As does the fact that discussion of the film pretty quickly drifted out of the arts sections of newspapers and into other venues. As Elaine M. Bapis notes, David Brinkley decried the film, in an installment of "David Brinkley's Journal" for *Ladies Home Journal*, for what he saw as its too thoroughgoing indictment of the older generation while Senator Jacob Javits, seeking to exploit the disaffections of the youth, turned reference to the movie into potential political capital.[6] Dustin Hoffman, propelled by his performance as Benjamin Braddock to quick stardom, was featured (along with Mia Farrow) on the cover of *Time* magazine.[7]

Since then, *The Graduate* has become part of the substance of America's pop-cultural consciousness—one measure of which is that although most of my students have not actually watched the film before encountering it in class, they all, in a sense, already know it. Without having seen it, they have nonetheless seen it—or, rather, parts of it—before: in television shows like *The Simpsons* (which restages moments from the movie in a variety of episodes, including one featuring work by Dustin Hoffman as substitute teacher Mr. Bergstrom: "Mrs. Krabappel, you're trying to seduce me") and *Family Guy* (where Lois at one point, for example, locks congregants in a synagogue using a star of David); in movies like *Wayne's World 2* ([1993] which, near its own conclusion, reenacts nearly the whole of the end of *The Graduate*), *American Pie* in its various installments (where the Finch/Stifler's Mom relation recalls and sometimes replays the Benjamin/Mrs. Robinson relation), and the *Shrek* films (which, like *The Simpsons*, have found various ways to reference the Nichols movie). Indeed, almost any time, in popular culture, an older woman gets romantically involved with a younger man, *The Graduate* gets explicitly alluded

to (by the title of the episode or in dialog) or evoked (principally by mise-en-scene).[8]

And yet, until very recently, little analytical work has been done on the film: more than has been done on either *Way Down East* or *Port of Shadows*, to be sure, but less than one would think. *The Graduate* was widely reviewed at the time of its release certainly, as one would expect given the phenomenon it became. Mentions, and sometimes brief discussions, of the film turn up in most reference works and textbooks that have to do with the cinema. Film histories, too, often gloss the text, examining *The Graduate* in varying degrees of depth, at varying degrees of length, and with varying degrees of sophistication. But as Whitehead has noted, after the first burst of extensive commentary that accompanied the film's release, a strange silence settled in and *The Graduate* was—by film critics of all types, if not by the public—largely "ignored" (3).

Apart from the sorts of works already mentioned (reviews, reference works, reportage, notes), twenty texts of different kinds (journal articles, book chapters, a monograph) offer, at the time of this writing, some consideration of Nichols's *The Graduate*.[9] But a majority of these (twelve of the twenty) do not take the movie as their primary focus.[10] Significantly most of those, in turn (nine of the twelve), offer either very limited (one- to two-page discussions) or no analysis of the film, focusing instead on the history of its production or using references to it to elaborate variously pitched cultural histories (typically some version of the emergence and/or significance of the New Hollywood).[11] One of the essays suggests that elements of Nichols's film serve as a useful means of getting at—and thus being able to teach—something else (in this case, the processes of reification), and is much more interested in the concept than the movie.[12] Another uses it as background against which to bring out features of more contemporary films (*Mother* [1996], *Laurel Canyon* [2002], and *Moonlight Mile* [2002]) that the author feels do a better job (measured largely in cultural-political terms) with similar (intertextually related) material.[13] A third sees (or perhaps more appropriately "hears") its use of music as exemplifying the function of music in film generally (that is, as underscoring, as it were, the essence of the film score), the emphasis falling on the articulation of a theory, not on the critical examination of a work.[14] Three of the twelve, then, do offer some extended examination of *The Graduate*. Two of the three simply split the focus, pairing consideration of the Nichols film with consideration of another text—the Scandinavian art-house flick *I Am Curious-Yellow* [1967], in one case,[15] the Charles Webb

novel on which the movie was based in the other.[16] For the remaining essay, *The Graduate* serves an illustrative and paradigmatic function: Jeff Menne situates *The Graduate* among an array of movies that he, following Thomas Elsaesser, identifies as a new genre, "the defection film," whose history—which he traces—functions as gloss on, or homology of, a larger cultural and political history (concerning the individual's relation to social institutions) that was unfolding during the period (the late 60s and early 70s) when the films that make up the genre were produced and released.

Some of these essays are quite good. Indeed, some of the best work on *The Graduate* can be found in them. Menne's analysis—both of the film and of the political, social, and cultural environment that produced it and that it addressed—seems to me, for example, consistently compelling. The interplay the article produces among the elements it triangulates—the history of the New Hollywood, 60s political history, the historical development of the defection film genre—enriches our understanding of each of those elements. And its discussion of the Nichols film, narrowly focused as it is, nicely negotiates the complexities of a central issue, the political implications of Benjamin Bradock's desultory resistance to his parents' values: finding a kind of political seriousness in Ben's malaise, alienation, and inarticulateness (a seriousness that helps explain, rather than dismissing as widespread misunderstanding on the part of callow youth, the enthusiasm with which the film was greeted by young Americans),[17] but without then presenting Ben as embodying any especially meaningful alternative to the world he desires to reject, Menne ties *The Graduate*'s depiction of its protagonist to the broadly felt perception, persisting throughout the 60s and early 70s, that withdrawal, a refusal of subjectivity, "the project of objecthood as an end in itself" (48), might well be the only possible response to a deadening and totalized "system." Søren Birkvad's "Hollywood Sin, Scandinavian Virtue: The 1967 Revolt of *I Am Curious* and *The Graduate*" also usefully contributes to the discussion, first by focusing on an issue that is surprisingly little analyzed, except in the most simplistic of terms, *The Graduate*'s representation of sex, which Birkvad sees as anchoring the movie's politically inflected "fatalism" (52) and, second, by recognizing the extent to which the second half of the film serves as self-reflexive critique of the very rebelliousness the first half celebrates.

Still, however, because analyzing *The Graduate* is not the central concern of either of these texts or of the other ten mentioned above, the analysis in these works is necessarily circumscribed: discussion of *The Graduate* takes up roughly five and a half pages in Menne's twenty-eight

page article, for example, and only two and a half of the Birkvad essay's twelve pages. Cogent points do get made, but their scope tends to be fairly limited.

Just eight texts, then, focus exclusively on the film.[18] Collectively, these texts are a very mixed bag. H. Wayne Schuth's monograph on Nichols includes a chapter on *The Graduate*, one of the earliest scholarly considerations of the film. The chapter is not so much an interpretation of the movie, however, as a series of disparate observations concerning mainly "color, music, and visual motif" (46). Some of these observations—the comment, for example, that as Benjamin moves through the early party scene "It looks as if he is swimming through the guests" (48)—are interesting enough; some ("The clown [in the painting in the stairwell of the Bradock home] symbolically stands for Benjamin" [48]) seem self-evident; and some, like his claim that the yellow shirt of a guest at Ben's birthday party is "perhaps a symbol of affluence or cowardice" or that the tan color of Mr. Robinson's shirt suggests that he "may not be a totally 'negative' person," strike as either arbitrary or just wrong (50). Geoffrey Hill, a psychotherapist, offers a Jungian, myth-symbol suffused reading of the movie in his book *Illuminating Shadows*. Again, as with Schuth's work, much of the discussion is unexceptionable, but the desire to fit the film into a mythic pattern produces really quite significant distortion: Ben becomes an unqualified hero pursuing a spiritual quest; he and Elaine become at the film's conclusion "the victorious royal couple" (211); and Mrs. Robinson, whom Hill characterizes variously as "the Terrible Mother" (202), "the evil side of the great goddess" (202), "Kali, Hecate, Ishtar, or one of the Gorgons" (202), as "the wicked witch of the San Fernando Valley" (206) and "the Dragon Lady" (211) gets forced into the role of demonic antagonist. Distortions of various sorts also mark Penny Starfield's "Duality in *The Graduate*": at the level of basic story elements (she claims, for example, that "the film … begins on the image of the mother's black dress [and] ends on that of her daughter's wedding gown, with its white veil floating behind her" (96), when, in fact, the dress Mrs. Braddock wears at the outset of the movie is also white and the film's conclusion quite emphatically shifts attention away from the potentially triumphant image of the runaway bride); at the level of critical description ("In his desire to inject meaning into his life," writes Starfield, "Benjamin launches into the affair with Mrs. Robinson but, like Romeo, he may be said to be *in love with love*" [90], a claim that flies in the face of the film's insistence that, although the Ben/Mrs. Robinson affair may arise from a certain

sympathy of attitudes, it has nothing whatsoever to do with love); and at the level of interpretation (in order to make the connections between *The Graduate* and *Lochinvar*, Starfield has to ignore the ironies surrounding Ben's pursuit of Elaine, which mostly plays as farce, not heroic quest). Glenn Man has a better overall sense of the movie and provides sensitive analysis of many of its features, but finally he wants to see a more affirmative narrative than the one actually on offer: taking issue with Nichols's own assessment that Ben and Elaine will ultimately be absorbed back into the consumerist culture they've tried to escape, he tries to make the case that the film, at its conclusion, "affirms the individual's need and ability to preserve a sense of integrity and innocence in the midst of compromise and disillusionment" (49), a position that necessitates fairly obvious misrepresentation. Attempting to situate Ben and Elaine's interaction in Berkeley in the context of 30s and 40s screwball comedy, for example, Man at one point describes them as "two strong-willed individuals verbally jousting" (44). But neither character has any verbal skills—indeed Ben is a notoriously inarticulate protagonist (Stephen Farber and Estelle Changas, in an early review object that, although Ben is "supposed to be a champion college debater … he can hardly form a sentence" [37])—and Elaine is as malleable as a child. Leger Grindon's chapter on *The Graduate* in his book on romantic comedy offers a lucid-enough critical description of the film, but like much, if not most, of the work on movies that is not explicitly theoretical, the essay is more oriented toward plot summary than toward directed analysis. Grindon nicely identifies many of the tensions that mark the film text—noting, for example, that while Mrs. Robinson at points serves as clear antagonist, at others "[s]he engages our compassion" (144) and that the conclusion of the film stages seemingly contradictory impulses—but he mainly just describes these tensions, rather than seeking to explain (and perhaps resolve) them. Robert Beuka does a superb job situating *The Graduate* in the context of a more general 60s-era anxiety concerning the threat suburbia poses to American masculinity, but the essay might well be catalogued with those works, discussed earlier, that address the movie but don't take it as primary focus, since Beuka spends nearly as much time on historical context and thematically related texts (John Cheever's "The Swimmer" as short story and movie; The Monkees' song "Pleasant Valley") as he does on *The Graduate*.

The two most sustained discussions of Nichols's film are the chapter Bapis devotes to it in *Camera and Action: American Film as Agent of Social Change, 1965–75* and Whitehead's *Appraising* The Graduate: *The*

Mike Nichols Classic and its Impact on Hollywood. The Bapis essay reflects extensive research of the film's reception. But while she evinces admiration for the movie, she is less interested in reading it than in charting its relevance to, and reflection of, contemporary cultural tensions—particularly those surrounding what was insistently being referred to as "The Generation Gap." On Bapis's account, *The Graduate* functioned as something of an ideological Rorschach's Test, with critics and political commentators exploiting the movie's complexities and ambiguities in order to produce the text they wanted either to champion or condemn. But Bapis's desultory cataloguing of this mixed response ends up making the film seem muddy and, indeed, muddies its relation to the very tensions she sees it as highlighting.

Whitehead covers every facet of the film: its production history, its reception, its legacy. He offers a scene-by-scene analysis that is insightful, comprehensive, and generally persuasive. He starts with the assertion—noted previously—that Nichols's film has been too little discussed. He then convincingly argues that when it has been discussed—by viewers, critics, journalists, political pundits, and politicians—it has been consistently mischaracterized, thus misunderstood: "this is the irony of the history of cultural reception of *The Graduate*: both those who love and those who dismiss the film have often demonstrated an essential failure to see the film for what it is" (3). What it is, Whitehead insists, is a "negative satire" from start to finish (4). That is, whereas most commentators see *The Graduate* as breaking into two distinct parts—a satiric dissection of post-World War II consumer capitalism in its first half; and, in its second, an earnest romantic comedy whose resolution either addresses or, depending on one's sense of the film as political statement or aesthetic whole, fails to address concerns raised by the critique of materialism and inauthenticity in part one—Whitehead sees the satire extending into the depiction of Elaine's pursuit by Ben, whose attempt at resistance is thwarted by a failure of vision. Many love the movie because it seems to them, at the end, that Ben gets the girl and that Ben and the girl get away from the world of their parents; many others find the film disappointing because it seems to them that Ben, at the end, gets *only* the girl and that he and the girl don't really get anywhere at all. Whitehead counters that Ben and Elaine's failure is precisely the point: "Benjamin isn't part of the solution; he's simply more of the problem" (47).

I think Whitehead is largely right about Ben, and one might be tempted to argue that, right or wrong, such sustained discussion in some sense

suffices—or that it should suffice. A dozen variously engaged, variously cursory considerations, a half dozen more, and more fully fledged, engagements, a whole book: What more could one want? By way of answering that question, I will, briefly, take up two concerns: the representation of Mrs. Robinson and the political implications of the film's conclusion.[19]

* * *

In their—annoyed, mostly hostile—review of *The Graduate* for *Film Quarterly* in 1968, Farber and Changas defend Mrs. Robinson from what they perceive to be *Nichols's* antipathy to her character: for Farber and Changas, Mrs. Robinson—despite, rather than because of Nichols's efforts—is the best thing about the movie. She is smart, self-aware, complex—interesting in a way no one else in the film really is. At least, that is how Mrs. Robinson comes across for Farber and Changas during the first half of the movie. In the second half, on their account, she gets demonized by Nichols, who, out of a lack of imagination as well as skill, turns her into "a hideous witch, an evil Furie" (39). With few exceptions, which I will discuss in a moment, most subsequent critics, less sensitive than Farber and Changas to Mrs. Robinson's initial attractiveness as a character, have tended to see her solely in negative terms. Hill, again, conceives of Mrs. Robinson as "the Terrible Mother of mythology" (202). Grindon refers to her, variously, as "the scoundrel seducer" and "the scoundrel predator" (141). Metz sees her as being presented by Nichols as "a selfish sexual succubus" (123). As noted above, a couple critics have taken a less one-sided view, finding tensions, if not complexity, in Mrs. Robinson's characterization. Thus, both Bapis and Man describe her, in Bapis's phrase, as "victimized and victimizer at the same time" (51).

Almost no one, however, deals meaningfully with the gender politics entailed by the presentation of Mrs. Robinson's character. Farber and Changas, in their sense that Nichols effectively betrays his creation (and that Elaine, as given, is "vacuous" [40]), imply problems in the representation of gender that the authors never really spell out. Metz, who needs an antifeminist *Graduate* to serve as foil for the more progressive films he wants to discuss, assumes and asserts, but never really argues, that Nichols's movie reflects an "intensive misogyny" (110). Whitehead, seeing all the particulars of the narrative, in terms of both content and style, as being determined by, and as reflecting, Ben's point of view, finesses the issue: Mrs. Robinson comes across as "predator" at the outset, because that is

how Ben sees her during their involvement (89); if she seems caricatural, it is because we see her "through the eyes of a naïf who caricatures the world" (90); "her monstrousness," Whitehead argues, "is a projection of Benjamin's inferiority complex" (107). "*The Graduate*," in sum, "doesn't condescend to women; it presents the point of view of a character held fast in terror and thrall of women" (92).

It seems to me that it would be worth discussing the possibility that the portrait of Mrs. Robinson functions much more progressively than has been assumed to date. A case can be made, in other words, that Farber and Changas are right to see her as the most "interesting" character in the movie, but wrong to attribute that interest solely to Anne Bancroft's performance and persona, and not to the film itself—as if the performance somehow existed outside the film and were somehow competing with it. As they note, Mrs. Robinson is more intelligent and self-aware than Ben is: indeed she is smarter than anyone else we see. And, along with Ben, she is the only character to recognize the world she lives in as the tawdry sham it is. Granted, of course, that the only power she possesses is the sexual power she wields over Ben during the first half of the film; but that power is never really presented in negative terms. It's made to seem to be comic; and it's clear that Mrs. Robinson—as measured, for example, by the obvious pleasure she takes in making Ben squirm, during their first encounter alone; or by the look of ironic bemusement that washes across her face as she talks to Ben by phone at the bar of the Taft Hotel the first night they meet there—is in on the jokes.

But while *The Graduate* does revel, at the outset, in the spectacle of Mrs. Robinson's sexual power, it also forcefully shows that this is, in fact, almost the only form power, for her, can take. The movie neither demonizes desire, nor condemns Mrs. Robinson for having desires, but it does set her deployment of sexuality in the context of restrictions and constrictions that circumscribe her life. By midpoint of the movie, that is, we clearly see that Mrs. Robinson is, and for years has been, trapped. And she is pointedly made sympathetic at those moments of the film that emphasize that entrapment.

Near the end of his affair with Mrs. Robinson, for example, Ben attempts to engage her in conversation—mainly in order, as he puts the point, to "liven this up." During the course of the scene we learn that an unwanted pregnancy forced Mrs. Robinson into a passionless and pointless marriage, that, prior to the pregnancy, she had been a college student majoring in art, and that, subsequent to the marriage, she subordinated

her own identity and aspirations to playing out the role of mother and wife. At the point when Mrs. Robinson is relating the circumstances surrounding her marriage, she and Benjamin are in bed, both facing the camera: that is, she has turned her back on Ben, who, half sitting up, hovers over her. She's uninflectedly talking into a void. We can see her expression, but Ben can't. And as she is summarizing for Ben the chain of circumstances—the pregnancy, the marriage, the giving up of her pursuit of a college degree in art (a shift in circumstances Ben cluelessly characterizes as her having "lost interest")—Mrs. Robinson's face becomes a loose grimace of abjection. The whole of her lost life registers in her expression, one that, prodding the viewer to contemplate Mrs. Robinson's tortured interior existence, clearly invites empathy (Image 3.1).

A similar image of abjection gets produced later in the movie, and not just by means of Anne Bancroft's acting. After Ben's romantic interests wander from Mrs. Robinson to her daughter, the former threatens to expose her and Ben's affair to the latter in order to block the romance developing between the two young people. Both Ben and Mrs. Robinson charge through a rainstorm toward the Robinson house, looking to be first to talk to Elaine. Ben bounds up the stairs to Elaine's bedroom, Mrs. Robinson trailing behind. With the door of the bedroom a little ajar, and Ben and Elaine within, Elaine's back to the door, Ben confesses the affair just as an out-of-focus image of Mrs. Robinson appears through the door opening behind Elaine. Ben looks from Elaine to the blurry image, a rack focus accompanying Elaine's turning to see what has drawn his attention.

Image 3.1 Seeing and not seeing Mrs. Robinson

For just a moment, the camera lingers on Mrs. Robinson's stricken expression. She walks out of view, a slow rack focus back to Elaine serving to underscore the daughter's dawning understanding of the full import of what Ben has been saying to her. As Elaine starts screaming, working to kick Ben out of the bedroom, there is a brief insert of a close-up of Mrs. Robinson, framed wholly in white. When Ben takes his leave, both he and the camera turn their attention to Mrs. Robinson, whose suffering face we again see in close-up. There is a slow zoom out, the camera revealed to be positioned just over Ben's shoulder. Mrs. Robinson—soaking wet, bedraggled, dressed in black—huddles in a corner of the white hallway, looking as though she has been wedged into the angle made by the two walls. Her figure grows smaller and smaller, making her seem more hemmed in, as well as more alone. "No image goes further in the film," argues Whitehead, "to convey the reality of self-destruction embedded within the vindictive impulse to destroy others" (136). But surely this image of a broken Mrs. Robinson works to invite, not our judgment, but our compassion. There is no glorying here in her defeat (Image 3.2).

And, because we haven't yet seen her trying to push her daughter into the same kind of empty, inauthentic marriage that ruined her own life, we

Image 3.2 Seeing Mrs. Robinson as trapped

have no grounds for seeing her as trying to "destroy others." Mostly, I think, she comes across at this moment as a victim of Ben's narcissism, his emotional and ethical sloppiness, and his ineptitude.

To be sure, after this point in the narrative, Mrs. Robinson will set in motion a process designed to marry her daughter off to a blandly blonde, pipe-smoking inanity who will trap Elaine, just as Mrs. Robinson herself was trapped by her marriage to an inane law-school student. She is wrong to do this, of course. And her doing it cuts against the grain of the subversiveness associated with the pleasure she derives from dabbling in adultery. Our sense of her no doubt diminishes over the second half of the film: sadly, while Mrs. Robinson, like Benjamin, is smart enough to see her world for the horror show it is, she—again, like Benjamin—can't imagine an alternative.

But finally there are more forces—cultural, historical, even biological—arrayed against her than there are arrayed against him. She is—by generation and gender—more trapped than he. In that light, her efforts at enclosing Elaine in the same kind of gilded cage *she* inhabits seem not so much signs of depravity as further evidence of her subjugation. And the film becomes, through this portrait of Mrs. Robinson, as much a critique of the self-replicating capacities of patriarchy as it is, through Ben's experience, of the power of consumer capitalism to disarm, diffuse, and ultimately coopt opposition.

Given the extant writing on the film, both journalistic and academic, that latter point, I suppose, cannot be taken as a given. That is, the political implications of the film have been only cursorily or obliquely addressed; and the question of its relation to the atmosphere of political and cultural turmoil out of which it emerged remains unsettled. The young who thronged to the theaters to see *The Graduate* when it was first released clearly felt the film spoke to their situation. The reported raucousness of their response to the scene at the church near the end of the movie suggests that they saw in Ben an image of rebellion and an indication, in his running off with Elaine, that their own lives could be—as Ben himself puts it early on—"different" from the lives of their parents. Backlash critics like Brackman, Farber, and Changas find this enthusiasm and identification to be simply misguided, symptomatizing a misreading of a movie the critics themselves see as much more conservative than are the mass of young people who seem so to admire it. Both the Brackman essay and the Farber and Changas essay present the film as reflecting attitudes and values of an earlier epoch, and as either disengaged from, or coyly exploitative of, the

real generational tensions that marked the mid-to-late 60s. Farber and Changas, near the conclusion of their essay, dismissively refer to *The Graduate* as "a Youth-grooving movie for old people" (40).

Academic critics, for their part, have mostly tended to ignore the question of the film's politics. Or, more precisely, although they start out discussing *The Graduate* as political and social satire, when they take up consideration of the second half of the film, where it shifts to what looks and feels like mainstream romantic comedy, the critics shift the terms of the discussion, too—toward more philosophically inflected deliberation over issues of personal fulfillment or, as they contemplate the countercurrents that mark the film's last half hour, toward questions of tone. Or they simply describe—effectively restaging, rather than addressing—those countercurrents. Bapis, for example, struggling to position *The Graduate* in relation to the political climate at the time of its release, mainly by comprehensively charting the various ways it was perceived, moves through an array of conflicting positions. Initially, she focuses on the ways the movie challenges Hollywood conventions surrounding sexual mores and finds a virtue in the "ending's ambiguity," which she sees as "the picture's strength and most telling moment"—a claim she doesn't explain. In fact, the immediate continuation of the thought effectively eliminates the ambiguity. "Ben and Elaine," she writes, "indeed carve out a road, a path to action for more than just the two of them. Climbing on board the bus is a defiant act, a symbolic act, and a representation of the younger generation's agency" (56)—thus ignoring the fact that Ben, when we last see him, has been returned to the passive, affectless state he started in, being borne along by mechanical conveyance without any clear sense of where he is going or why. But then, after seeming to have settled the question of the movie's political valence, in favor of seeing it as endorsing youthful rebellion against the status quo, she summarizes concerns raised by the backlash critics and seems to argue that *The Graduate* is as much a sell-out as those critics suggested: "the film self-consciously derides affluence as an older generation's affliction while unselfconsciously reinforcing a culture of 'cool,' favoring sunglasses not frogman suits" (57). She then attempts to square this circle by reverting to a consideration of the film's reception by the young: "what Ben came to mean in generational appeal measured the kind of change that mattered to young people in rebellion" (59). And she ends on a note of compromise: "If *The Graduate* failed to highlight the political setting many critics expected of a popular and artistic feature film, it also resonated more clearly on a level that enhanced the human

drama in social relationships" (59). The conceptual slippage here seems to me symptomatic. Grindon, for example, after noting the controversy surrounding the film's final scene concludes that "Mike Nichols included Ben and Elaine in his critique of the conventions of romantic comedy, but the youth audience, then and now, longs to see them as allies and agents of social change" (149)—a formulation that moves from an observation about conventional form (romantic comedy as a genre) to one about political and cultural context (the pointedly historical desire on the part of 60s-era youth for cultural change, a pointedly historical desire that gets pointedly universalized) without clearly articulating the bearing the former has on the latter.

For Man, the seemingly bleak concluding scene—with Ben and Elaine on a bus to nowhere, sitting together but really quite alone, isolated both from one another and from the other passengers on the bus, staring off into space—does not undercut what he sees as "the overwhelmingly positive effect of the film's second half" (48). Rather, it adds a note of realism, preventing the film from drifting into "fantasy, wish fulfillment, utopia" (49): "Ben and Elaine must now consider what they have done and the difficulties that lie ahead. Their achievement can be measured only by its continued expression in the world of their fathers and mothers. The test is not over; it has only just begun. To maintain their integrity, Ben and Elaine must sustain commitment to their original choice in their daily acts within the whirlpool of society. They have, however, taken the first step. The future is uncertain; the road lies perilous before them. The coded implication of the final image, though, is satisfying. The bus drives off into the distance and away from the bewildered crowd" (50). That this reading is itself a sort of fantasy can perhaps be made most directly by pointing out that "the bewildered crowd" is not behind but in front of Ben and Elaine, traveling with them, a crowd that seems to them utterly alien, but one that they can never leave. More important for my purposes, the passage focuses not on what Ben's and Elaine's gesture, however we read it, means to, or for, the world they inhabit—that troubled world the movie evokes and the contemporary audience inhabits—but only on what it may mean to, and for, Ben and Elaine.

Schuth similarly deflects analysis away from the political context in which *The Graduate* seems early on to want to situate itself and toward personal drama: "*The Graduate* is not a heavy protest film like *Getting Straight* or *The Strawberry Statement*.... The film is about Benjamin and what happens to him" (60–61). And Whitehead, too, argues that *The*

Graduate says nothing about the political upheavals of the late 60s. "*The Graduate* is less a slice of late-Sixties life than a critique of late-modern consumer culture without a particular epochal reference point" (18). "It's a negative satire," he later goes on to write, and its target is the affluent, materialist bankruptcy of post-World War II American culture and the manufacture of the next generation of hollow men" (36). Thus the only critic who sees *The Graduate* as having something specific to say about 60s-era generational politics is Menne, who, again, characterizes the film as participating in the discourse of negation and refusal that was a common currency, among the politicized young, in considerations of the relations between individuals and institutions.

As it stands, then, the history of critical engagement with *The Graduate*'s relation to the counter-cultural politics of the period during which it was made and into which it was released leaves, I want to say, a fair amount of room to maneuver. For example, it seems to me possible to imagine conceding Whitehead's point that Ben is as much a part of the film's satire as are his parents and their friends—that he therefore offers no meaningful alternative to his parents' world and values—without conceding that the film therefore says nothing about the political tensions of the period. In more particular terms, one could argue that Ben, in embodying a negative example—in this case, of how to respond to the superficiality and inauthenticity of post-War American culture—*points toward* more positive options.

That Whitehead is right in claiming that Ben is a butt of *The Graduate*'s satiric humor seems to me obvious—so obvious in fact that I won't belabor the point (by, say, cataloging all the ways Ben comes across, from the beginning of the movie to its final images, as inept, awkward, impulsive and adrift, as hopelessly naïve and pathetically obtuse). Rather, taking one brief moment in the movie as paradigmatic, I want to focus on his relentless conventionality and lack of imagination.

At the very beginning of the movie, when Ben's parents usher him downstairs into the graduation party—a geriatric gathering that immediately controverts Mr. Braddock's assertion that Ben's "very good friends" are waiting—he is first greeted by the Carlsons, who, apparently, have come "all the way from Tarzana." Mrs. Carlson gives him a quick buss on the cheek, muttering how the guests are "all very proud" of Ben. He thanks her, a faint, disarming but noncommittal smile frozen on his face. "Is that the new car out there," Mr. Carlson intervenes, "that little red Wop job?" "That's Ben's graduation present," explains Mr. Braddock.

"Well, you won't have any trouble picking up in that, will you?" continues Mr. Carlson, his casual sexism complementing his casual racism. Ben can't initially process the comment, which clearly strikes him not just as disorienting but disturbing. "Sir?" he asks, the faint smile still frozen on his face. "The girls," Mr. Carlson explains, and even more absurdly "the chicks, the teenyboppers." Having this old man, this father figure (one of many in the movie), suddenly start talking about sex in a borrowed language must seem to Ben like hearing a dog speak. Mrs. Carlson comes to the rescue: "Oh, I think Ben's gotten beyond the teenybopper stage," she says, "haven't you Ben?" "Yes, ma'am," he says, while giving her an ingratiating, knowing wink.

It's the wink—that gesture of appeasement and complicity, of shared knowledge and shared values—that I want to focus on. It seems to me to epitomize Ben's stance toward the world he was born to inherit (Image 3.3).

He knows perfectly well that the conversation is fatuous. He feels vaguely alienated from it. And as the look of incipient panic and desperation that registers briefly when he makes the first of several efforts to escape indicates, he finds the people around him annoying, the attention they are giving him suffocating, and the general cultural atmosphere oppressive. But his instinct is to go with the flow—to seem to give back to this superficial, status-oriented world what it seems to want from him. Some part of him would like to resist, to rebel, but finally he knows only how to submit.

Image 3.3 Ben going with the flow

One might, of course, argue that Ben gradually grows out of this reflexive tractability, that the whole point of the film is to chart Ben's movement from this particular point A to a point B defined by greater independence of both behavior and thought. He does, after all, engage in a month-long affair with the wife of his father's friend and business partner, a man who, "in many ways," he tells Ben, "feel[s] as though [Ben] were [his] own son." And at the end of the movie, Ben crashes a wedding, attacks the bride's father, holds his adversaries at bay by using a large crucifix as a weapon (the very image, one might say, of iconoclasm), and spirits away the object of his affections not before but after she has married another man. Surely these count as gestures of defiance, as so many floutings of society's rules.

But all Ben's efforts at opposing the system, I want to suggest, have a kind of peculiarly Foucauldian feel to them. Always already contained by the system, they only serve to underscore its hold over him. His fling with Mrs. Robinson, for example, is almost a prescribed right of passage in the society in which he lives. In some strange sense, in fact, he is, in having the affair, only following the sage counsel Mr. Robinson himself proffers the night of the graduation party: "You have yourself a few flings this summer," Mr. Robinson tells Ben moments after Mrs. Robinson has offered herself to the new graduate. "Sow a few wild oats; take things as they come." Given the repeated compliments Mr. Robinson pays to Ben's supposed sexual prowess ("I'll bet you're quite a ladies' man," he says after suggesting the flings; "I want you to keep your wits about you tonight," he tells his daughter just before Ben's and Elaine's big date. "You never know what tricks Ben picked up back there in the East.") it's clear that Mr. Robinson would not only approve of the affair but would applaud Ben for the vigor it reflects—if only the woman involved weren't his own wife. Because of the patriarchal cast of the culture the film depicts, Mrs. Robinson's dallying with Ben radiates anger, edginess, insubordination; Ben's dallying with her, on the other hand, seems just the flip side of his college career, another kind of accomplishment, another form of 60s-era acculturation, like taking up smoking.

And his proposal to marry Elaine achieves the remarkable effect of seeming at once preposterous and utterly conventional. Its preposterousness comes across in a variety of ways. First, of course, Ben's plan is made a source of comedy: after informing his parents of his intention to marry Elaine, he is forced to admit that he hasn't discussed the issue with her, and that she is likely to resist the proposition because, as Ben puts it, "she

doesn't like" him. His father, reasonably enough, calls the idea "half-baked." Ben's response—"No it's not. It's completely baked"—elicits laughter. But it's important to note that it is laughter directed *at* Ben and his harebrained, Quixotic scheme. Second, Elaine's response to Ben's proposal also serves to underscore the absurdity of the idea, since it marks her—at this point in her life at any rate—as unfit for any serious relationship. She humors Ben after his arrival at Berkeley, despite the fact that she (apparently) believes that Ben raped her mother. In a desultory way, she then entertains the idea of the marriage, but she isn't sure. She "might" marry Ben. But, then again, she might marry Karl Smith, "the old make-out king." Throughout her deliberations, if that's what her entertaining options can be called, she comes across as confused and flighty, shallow and vaguely narcissistic—as too vapid, too childlike for marriage. It is in part because the film defines Elaine in this way that—third—Ben's stalker-like interest in her strikes, as a few of the backlash reviewers noted, as peculiarly unmotivated. Ben and Elaine go on one date before he decides to marry her. The date begins badly and ends well enough, but nothing that we see happen makes sense of his abrupt obsession with her. They are both young, bland, well brought up. They both defer to their elders (he makes an ass of himself at his own birthday party at his father's behest; she actually goes so far as to marry someone she doesn't love because that's what her parents want her to do.) But their similarity in terms of station and character (or characterlessness) isn't worked to justify the attraction—which, since it seems to have nothing whatsoever to do with sex (compare, for example, Ben and Elaine's conversation over fast food with Romeo and Juliet's hormonally charged first verbal exchanges), appears to be, again, kind of arbitrary. Or, rather, the lack of motivation highlights the extent to which Ben's decision to marry Elaine is a grasping at straws—a desperate attempt to assert and define himself.

The conventionality of the gesture is obvious—as Ben's mother's hyperbolically orgasmic shriek when she hears about the plan makes clear. Indeed, making a match between Ben and Elaine is a central goal of both sets of parents (Mrs. Robinson excluded, of course). Ben's mother and father repeatedly prompt Ben to take Elaine out on a date; and Mr. Robinson almost seems at several points to be pimping his daughter out to young Braddock. The idea of a marriage between the two is thus wholly in keeping with the desires of the upper-middle class culture to which Ben and Elaine belong.

The last third of the film is, of course, marked by a lot of movement on Ben's part. He runs, he leaps, he drives fast, he fights Mr. Robinson, attacks a crowd; and the activity seems, initially, to mark a transformation in Ben—from the mannequin we first see being dragged along on a conveyor belt and equated with luggage, to a daring, defiant, romantic hero. But for all the frenzied, frenetic running around Ben does in his efforts to lay claim to Elaine, he gets—finally—nowhere. Again, the end of the film images him just as he was imaged at the outset, being passively pulled along—aimless and empty—with the lugubrious lament of Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence" playing in the background for the third, and last, time, in order to hammer home the notion that Ben is stuck, that he has effectively just been running in place, that he has become mired in a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction whose sources he doesn't fully understand and which he therefore doesn't know how to remedy. Whitehead is clearly right on this score: as a rebel Ben is a failure.

But that doesn't mean—as the backlash critics believed and as Whitehead, in a quite different vein, argues—that *The Graduate* doesn't really speak to its cultural-political moment. If we take the film to be, as Whitehead has it, a "negative satire," and we take Ben to be, both in his character and in his actions, a negative example, we can see *The Graduate* as not just identifying the wrong way to go about producing difference—difference being defined in this case by some meaningful shift in cultural values—but also as pointing toward, if not quite presenting, what might be the right way. The wrong way, of course, since it doesn't work, is Ben's way. But what does that mean? What, in fact, is he getting wrong? Why is he left, at the end, just where he started?

First, although Ben clearly finds the materialism and attendant status-seeking of his parents' generation to be not only unfulfilling but oppressive, he never definitively dissociates himself from that materialism. He keeps the gifted Alfa Romeo; he lounges in his parents' pool; and he uses their money to finance first his affair with Mrs. Robinson then his pursuit of Elaine (how else could he pay the hotel bill at the Taft and the rent for the rooming house in Berkeley?).[20] Second, just as he can't bring himself to break with the privileges and comforts that his moneyed background provides, he also can't break from the cultural formations—like a conventional marriage—that help stabilize the stratified structure producing those privileges and comforts. Dreaming of the "different," Ben can only (re)produce the same.

Finally, although Ben has an inchoate sense that the problem plaguing him has a political dimension ("It's like I've been playing some kind of game," he tells Elaine at the drive-in restaurant, "but the rules don't make any sense to me. They're being made up by all the wrong people. No, I mean no one makes them up. They seem to make themselves up."), he never once considers that it might require a political solution. To the extent that he conceives of a response, he conceives of it only in terms of personal satisfaction, in terms of his own private sense of contentment and purpose. This is why the idea of marrying Elaine can present itself to him as a fix for his felt dilemma. Marrying Elaine, he thinks, will feel right. Marrying Elaine will make him happy.

If we take Ben's reaction to his feelings of anomie and alienation—his abrupt decision, that is, to marry Elaine Robinson—to be a kind of obverse image of a more serviceable response; if, that is, we follow the logic of the film's insistence that socially sanctioned efforts at *self*-fulfillment won't—indeed, can't—put a point to the kind of malaise Ben is experiencing, what we inevitably end up with is some form of specifically political engagement, some form of specifically political action. Obviously enough, the movie doesn't directly portray such a response: it doesn't put Ben in contrastive relation to, doesn't play him off, some young Tom Hayden type. Doing that would have made the movie conceptually easier to process. But it would have also made *The Graduate* simpler, more schematic, and less compelling. That Tom Hayden-like figure—the image of the politically aware, socially active youth—does, however, I want to suggest, haunt the film: it is evoked by *The Graduate*'s insistence on its contemporaneity (the straight-from-the-charts soundtrack, the European, mainly New Wave stylistic flourishes), by its firm grounding in the felt experience of a generation gap (that element of the movie so strongly experienced by its first youthful audience), by its brief reference, during Ben's sojourn in Berkeley, to "outside agitators" (a phrase deployed by the dominant culture in order to minimalize the significance of political protest),[21] and by Ben's vague sense of a problem with the "system" and how it is run; and it is defined for us negatively, by means of Ben's failure to find the conditions of possibility for a life different from that of his parents. Whatever the particulars, a potentially effective response to Ben's problem would necessitate, not just disdain for materialism, but renunciation of wealth, status, and privilege; it would entail a thoroughgoing rethinking, if not rejection, of social convention; and, most importantly, it would require working with others toward the goal, not of personal fulfillment, but of social change.

As Brackman and others at the time noted, there were plenty of young people taking this more radical, more political approach to the problem of producing difference. But, as time told, there were at least as many, if not more who, like Ben, were looking for personal solutions to cultural and political problems, and who, as a consequence, got easily absorbed into, or marginalized by, the system (because they remained ineffectually anxious and angry, or drifted into a kind of quietistic hedonism, or doubled down on consumerist values, or simply dropped out). Seen in this light, *The Graduate* comes across, not just as a warning against Candide-like responses to an awareness of social disease, but as a cautionary tale concerning the risks involved, for those young people at the time who saw themselves as at odds with the world their parents had built for them, in failing to act politically. It's a warning that more among the film's early audience would have done well to heed.

The danger, of course, in discussing *The Graduate* at such length is that I will end up giving the impression that extant critical commentary on the film is extensive—despite the fact that I started by insisting that the Nichols film has attracted relatively little scholarly attention. I think that claim was right. But perhaps the best way to make it more persuasive is, again, to draw some comparisons with literary texts.

My first thought here was Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. Like *The Graduate*, Pynchon's novella is a satire. Like the film, it first appeared in the mid-60s and spoke to and (to some extent about) the emergent youth culture of the period. In terms of style and texture, it felt new (though it was somewhat more tepidly reviewed than *V* had been a few years earlier). Because parts of *Lot 49* were originally published in *Esquire* and *Cavalier*, I could make the case that the text, unlike, say, *Ulysses*, was not tailored to the tastes of a cultural elite—not designed, that is, to be pored over by critics; that it was, in fact, like the film, aimed at a mass audience. But almost as soon as I had this thought, I knew that the comparison would be met with vehement objection. Pynchon, after all, is one of the most important contemporary American writers, a defining figure for postmodern fiction, and *Lot 49* has gradually come to be considered a central work. Nichols was a successful, though not especially critically acclaimed, director of popular entertainment, and *The Graduate*, while very well known, has never achieved the stature of the European art films to which it alluded and whose style it evoked.

More plausible alternatives present themselves. But before briefly cataloguing critical commentary on these texts, I need to note that, in order

to be comparing like to like, I use, for the purposes of the following comparisons, just two indexes (and thus ignore some of the digging I did to turn up scholarship on *The Graduate*: for the literary texts, I use the MLA Bibliography; for *The Graduate*, I use both the MLA Bibliography and the Berkeley Film Bibliography.

A straightforward "Advanced Search" of the MLA database using the key words "Mike," "Nichols," and "Graduate"—and limiting the search to English-language texts, yields eight listings. Six of the eight are substantive, referring to texts that focus on the film (two), that compare it with some other text (two), or that deal with the film meaningfully in the context of discussing something else (two). One of the entries refers to a brief (two-page) note on the movie; and another refers to an interview with Buck Henry, who wrote the screenplay for the film.[22] The Berkeley Bibliography, with twenty-seven entries, is more comprehensive. But just over half the entries (thirteen) refer to notes, brief mentions, brief reminiscences, and the like. Five essays listed focus exclusively on the film, five more compare it to another text, and three offer substantive commentary while focusing on some larger topic.

The literary texts I have in mind as points of comparison are J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. Although the former was published a good fifteen years before the movie's release and the latter set in the 40s, both resonate forcefully with 60s-era generational tensions. Benjamin Braddock's upper middle-class malaise seems in many ways a replay of Holden Caulfield's (as if we were somehow seeing in Ben an image of Holden later in life). And while Captain Yossarian's harrowing negotiations with military bureaucracy during World War II seem far removed from Ben's efforts to avoid drowning in consumer comforts in the 60s, Yossarian's experience of the absurdities of war spoke more directly to the concerns of Ben's generation than to Yossarian's own—which no doubt accounts for the novel's popularity among the young throughout the 60s, and for the fact that it was, as the advertising blurbs have it, "made into a major motion picture" in 1970, directed, of course, by Mike Nichols.

Like *The Graduate*, moreover, both *Catcher in the Rye* and *Catch-22* have attracted, at various times and for varying durations, devoted, cult-like fans. And both have had significant cultural impact—the latter having contributed a phrase to the language, and the former having become imbricated in the popular imagination with the idea of assassination. Both, like the movie, have generated extensive allusions in literature and popular

culture, so that, as is the case with the film, even those who have never encountered these texts directly have had at least some (echoic) contact with their contents. Finally, despite their popularity, neither novel has achieved the stature of, for example, Pynchon's work, their reputations with the intelligentsia being—like that of *The Graduate*—decidedly mixed.

Searching for critical work on Heller's *Catch-22* (with the keywords "Joseph," "Heller," and "Catch"—and with the same limitations as in the case of *The Graduate*) turns up 144 entries (excluding the two entries for bibliographies of the novel and several errant duplicate entries).[23] Roughly a quarter of these (thirty-six, by my count) concern brief mentions of the text in notes, or discussions of the novel in works focused on larger issues. Some of the latter might well be substantive (without reading them all, it would be hard to tell); but it is clear from the titles and the accompanying listings of subject terms that the primary focus in these analyses is not *Catch-22*. Another fifteen percent or so (twenty-three entries) compare *Catch-22* with one or more other texts. There are a few essays oriented toward biography (including one interview with Heller). But that leaves eighty articles or book chapters focused exclusively on the novel. And the database makes reference to three books devoted to its consideration (although only two of them are indexed.) I can't speak to the quality of the analysis in these cases; but it seems to me unlikely that all are bad. One expects, as in the case of the critical commentary on *The Graduate*, some mixture of the good, the bad, and the indifferent. But the sheer volume of material here makes it likely that Heller's work has been pretty thoroughly, if not exhaustively, analyzed. That is not true, I have been arguing, in the case of the movie. The numbers are, I want to suggest, telling: in MLA, 8 entries for the film, 144 for the novel; at most 13 substantive texts dealing with *The Graduate*, as compared to the 80 that seem to focus on *Catch-22*.

The Catcher in the Rye is even more comprehensively covered than is Heller's novel. The MLA Bibliography gives, minus the redundancies, 196 entries for *Catcher in the Rye*. Included are eight books and ninety-nine journal articles or book chapters focused on the text. Granted that twenty-three of the book chapters come from three of the books (which are collections of essays on *Catcher*), so those listings overlap. But that still leaves a considerable amount of work (surely well over a thousand pages) centering around the novel, especially if one throws in the thirty-one essays that compare *Catcher* with one or more other texts and the nearly sixty that deal briefly with the novel or that set discussion of it in the context of larger concerns. Again, my point is simply this—that the scale of

the critical reception, when one is dealing with literary texts, is just vastly larger than it is when one is dealing with film.[24]

Notes

1. A number of reviewers and critics mention this fact. See, e.g., J. W. Whitehead, *Appraising* The Graduate: *The Mike Nichols Classic and Its Impact in Hollywood* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), p. 1, hereafter cited in text.
2. Paul Monaco, "1967: The Watershed Year," *History of American Cinema, Volume 8, The Sixties: 1960–1969* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York: 2001), 184, refers to an "audience survey" that has "72 percent of the viewers being under the age of twenty-four, and 26 percent in the age group twenty-four to thirty, leaving only 4 percent over thirty years of age."
3. Hollis Alpert, "*The Graduate* Makes Out," *Film: Readings in the Mass Media*, ed. Allen Kirschner and Linda Kirschner (New York: Odyssey, 1971), 271. The article was originally published in *The Saturday Review*, 6 July 1968. It can also be found, along with a number of others, online: D. McGee, "Essays and Reviews," *The Graduate*: A Resource for Film Students and Fans: http://web.blomand.net/~dennmac/reviews.html.
4. Stanley Kauffman, "Cum Laude," *A Casebook on Film*, ed. Charles Thomas Samuels (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), 141, 145. The essay appeared initially in *The New Republic*, 23 December 1967.
5. Whitehead discusses the backlash against *The Graduate* at a number of points. He introduces it in the "Preface," 1: "Not everyone liked the film and its director, however. Nichols and *The Graduate* were either savaged or, perhaps worse, dismissed by a backlash cadre of establishment critics, including the greatest names in the liveliest era of film criticism: Pauline Kael (dismissive); Andrew Sarris (initially positive but ultimately dismissive); John Simon (savage). Most notorious was a 33-page essay by Jacob Brackman in *The New Yorker*."

   The cultural critics who saw the film as belated, associated not with the 60s but the 50s, were Jacob Brackman, "*The Graduate*," *The New Yorker*, 27 July 1968, 34–66 and Stephen Farber and Estelle Changas, "*The Graduate*," *Film Quarterly* 21.3 (1968), 37–41, hereafter cited in text.
6. See Elaine M. Bapis, *Camera and Action: American Film as Agent of Social Change, 1965–1975* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 46. The article by David Brinkley can be found at the website identified in n. 3: http://web.blomand.net/~dennmac/review12.html.
7. *Time*, February 7, 1969.
8. Dustin Hoffman does the voice-over for Mr. Bergstrom credited as "Sam Etic": "Lisa's Substitute," *The Simpsons, written by* Josh Vitti, directed by

Rick Moore (Fox: Los Angeles, 25 April 1991: season 2, episode 19). But The *Simpsons* pretty regularly references *The Graduate*. For example, "Beware My Cheating Bart," (written by Ben Joseph, directed by Mark Kirkland [Fox: Los Angeles, 15 April 2012: season 23, episode 18]) parodies the Ben/Mrs. Robinson affair-montage cut over Simon and Garfunkel's "April Come She Will." *Family Guy* refers to *The Graduate* in episode 22 of season 3, "When You Wish upon a Weinstein" (written by Ricky Blitt, directed by Dan Povenmire [Fox: Los Angeles, 9 November 2003]).

9. Searches conducted summer 2014. See H. Wayne Schuth, "*The Graduate," Mike Nichols* (Boston, 1978), 45–63, hereafter cited in text; Stanley Cavell, "The World as Mortal: Absolute Age and Youth," *The World Viewed*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979), 76–78; B. H. Fairchild and Pete Fairchild, "'Plastics': *The Graduate* as Film and Novel," *Studies in American Humor* 4.3 (1985), 133–41; Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, "From Counterculture to Counterrevolution: 1967–1971," *Camera Politica* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), 17–48; Geoffrey Hill, "*The Graduate:* The Terrible Mother from the Black Lagoon," *Illuminating Shadows: The Mythic Power of Film* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 194–211, hereafter cited in text; Glenn Man, "1967–1968, The Wonder Year, Part II: *The Graduate* and *2001: A Space Odyssey," Radical Visions: American Film Renaissance* (Westport: Greenwood, 1994), 33–50, hereafter cited in text; Penny Starfield, "Duality in *The Graduate*," *Caliban* 32 (1995), 89–102, hereafter cited in text; David Shumway, "Rock 'n Roll Soundtracks and the Production of Nostalgia," *Cinema Journal* 38.2 (1999), 36–54; Robert Beuka, "Just One Word … 'Plastics': Suburban Malaise, Masculinity, and Oedipal Drive in *The Graduate*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 28.1 (2000), 12–21; Todd Berliner and Philip Furia, "The Sounds of Silence: Songs in Hollywood Films since the 1960s," *Style* 36.1 (2002), 19–35; Walter Metz, "Consuming *The Graduate:* A Postfeminist Analysis of *Mother, Laurel Canyon, and Moonlight Mile* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 107–28, hereafter cited in text; Reni Celeste, "The Sound of Silence: Film Music and Lament," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 22.2 (2005), 113–24; Elaine Bapis, "*The Graduate:* Representing a Generation," *Camera and Action: American Film as Agent of Social Change, 1965–1975* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), 41–60, hereafter cited in text; Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution: Moveis and the Birth of the New Hollywood* (New York: Penguin, 2008); Murray Pomerance, "Movies and the Specter of Rebellion," *American Cinema of the 1960s*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2008), 172–92; Aaron Cooley, "Reviving Reification: Education, Indoctrination, and Anxiety in *The Graduate*," *Educational Studies* 45 (2009), 358–76; Søren Birkvad,

"Hollywood Sin, Scandinavian Virtue: The 1967 Revolt of *I Am Curious* and *The Graduate*," *Film International* 9.2 (2011), 42–54, hereafter cited in text; Leger Grindon, "*The Graduate:* Counter-Conventions and Cultural Change," in *Hollywood Romantic Comedy* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 139–49, hereafter cited in text; Jeff Menne, "The Cinema of Defection: Auteur Theory and Institutional Life," *Representations* 114 (2011), 36–64, hereafter cited in text; and Whitehead.

In addition to leaving off from this catalogue references to encyclopedia entries and the like, I've also excluded brief discussions of the film in textbooks, even though these sometimes offer useful observations. I've dropped two other texts from consideration as well: William V. Costanzo, "*The Graduate*," *Reading the Movies: Twelve Great Films on Video and How to Teach Them* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992), 113–20; and Dean Sluyter, "*The Graduate* (1967): Whaddya Got?" *Cinema Nirvana: Enlightenment Lessons from the Movies* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 68–80. The former offers a three-and-a-half page summary analysis, a Nichols filmography, a short bibliography, and study-guide questions. It is designed, not to analyze the film, but to indicate a few main concerns and point students and teachers toward issues to discuss. While the latter does offer sometimes helpful observations about *The Graduate* (Ben's "affair with the fortyish family friend … is a way of reaching for something different: sex as rebellion" [73]), it is mostly geared, as the subtitle of the book suggests, toward drawing Buddhist insights from descriptions of the plot: "The very things that pull us into samsaric involvement also offer fresh opportunities for nirvanic transcendence, sex included" (74).

10. Cavell, Fairchild and Fairchild, Ryan and Kellner, Schumway, Berliner and Furia, Metz, Celeste, Harris, Pomerance, Cooley, Birkvad, and Menne.
11. Cavell, Ryan and Kellner, Schumway, Berliner and Furia, Metz, Celeste, Harris, Pomerance, and Cooley.
12. Cooley.
13. Metz.
14. Celeste.
15. Birkvad.
16. Fairchild and Fairchild.
17. Brackman, early on, and both Bapis and Whitehead, more recently, see the film's popularity with young people at the time of its release, as being, at some level, based on misunderstanding.
18. Schuth, Hill, Man, Starfield, Beuka, Bapis, Grindon, Whitehead.
19. It might be objected that I have drifted, in this examination of the literature on *The Graduate* from a quantitative to a qualitative analysis—from the claim that films have received too little scholarly attention to the claim

that extant criticism of individual films isn't very good. The two points are, however, related: it seems to me safe to assume that the quality of work being done in any given field will vary considerably, and that only a small portion of that work will be informative, insightful, and novel. The less work done overall, the less good work there will be. The less chance, too, of seeing some dialectical movement in the criticism, the kind of movement that produces really fine-grained analysis.

20. I owe the observation about Ben's dependence on his parents money during the sojourn in Berkeley to Whitehead, who points out that in the Charles Webb novel on which the film is based, Ben sells the Alfa Romeo to pay his expenses, but that in the film Ben's "Berkeley idyll is underwritten by his father's patronage," 141.
21. Mr. McCleery (Norman Fell), the owner/manager of the boarding house into which Ben moves when he arrives in Berkeley, grills Ben about his politics: "You're not one of those agitators … one of those outside agitators. I hate that. I won't stand for it." And, of course, Ben is not an agitator—outside or otherwise.
22. The six substantive essays have already been listed (see n. 9): Fairchild and Fairchild, Starfield, Beuka, Celeste, Birkvad, and Menne. The other two, left off the previous list because one is a note and the other a report of an interview, are: Peter N. Chumo II, "An Affair to Remember: Buck Henry on Writing *The Graduate," Creative Screenwriting* 12.6 (2005). 69–72; and Eric Henrichsen, "Emasculating American Bourgeoisie Culture: *The Graduate* and the Critique of Material Prosperity as Happiness," *Film Matters* 3.2 (2012), 57–59.
23. Search conducted 13 July, 2015.
24. I suppose one might say apropos of this claim: "Well, of course it is. It's larger because the field of literary studies is larger and more well established. Significantly more people work on literature than work on film: there are more departments of literature; the departments are bigger; they have been around longer. That's just to be expected." But my point isn't really that literary texts get more fully discussed than film texts do. The reason I bother with that rather banal claim is in order to try to make the case that film texts have not been dealt with much at all. The comparison with literary studies, in other words, is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

CHAPTER 4

Artistic Solutions to Sociological Problems: Seeing (with) Giuliana in Antonioni's *Red Desert* (Il deserto rosso, 1964)

I want in this chapter to try to meet a potential objection. I can imagine someone arguing at this point that, because the film texts so far discussed were all conceived and produced as popular entertainments, with no pretentions, that is, to the status of art, it makes a kind of sense that they have received relatively little scholarly attention: films of this sort, so the argument might go, were not designed to—and in fact can't—sustain such attention. Given the current academic and cultural climate—the quite institutionalized blurring of distinctions between high and low, the valuing of the popular as privileged point of access to historical analysis—such an objection would necessarily strike as a bit retrograde. And given that at least a few of the filmmakers whose works *have* been extensively studied—Hitchcock, for example, or Ford—saw themselves, not so much as artists, but as craftspeople functioning within an industry devoted to entertainment, it can't help but seem specious. But I can nonetheless imagine its being made: what we really ought to be looking at, someone might say, are works by filmmakers who saw themselves as artists, whose films were designed to be scrutinized and picked apart, watched and re-watched. Again, I'm not sure the assumptions on which such an objection is based are valid, but I want, as I said, to try to meet it.

A host of possible films and filmmakers immediately spring to mind: *Last Year at Marienbad* (L'Année dernière à Marienbad, 1961), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *The 400 Blows* (Les Quatre cents coups, 1959), *Wild Strawberries* (Smultronstället, 1957). Bresson, Godard, Fellini, Kurasawa,

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_4

Buñuel. I must admit that the film I ultimately decided to discuss at this point was more self-consciously chosen—more pointedly weighed against alternatives—than the preceding three. For that reason I want briefly to indicate how I came to the decision.

I knew, of course, that I wanted to take up consideration of a European art film. In the interests of scope, I knew I didn't want to discuss an English-language or French-language film (since I have already treated both). But I felt that selecting anything that fell too far afield of the Western European canon might invite charges of my having cherry picked my evidence, so I set aside consideration of anything that had even a whiff of the unfamiliar about it. I eventually narrowed the field down to the following four filmmakers: Luis Buñuel, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. My guess is that the results of canvassing the critical commentary on the work of any of the four would be similar, but I finally settled on Antonioni—in part because I know his work better than I know the work of the other three directors, and in part because Antonioni seems the most explicitly high-modern of the group. As one critic puts the point: "Since the 1960s, Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni has come to be regarded as the very quintessence of the art-film director."[1] As for the specific film: as I've noted before, film studies in a given field tends to exhaust itself in pursuit of exemplary film texts, with the result that one or two films (or perhaps a few, if the field is extensive) effectively "stand in" for the whole of a field. In the case of the terrain identified by the name Antonioni, the exemplary text is of course *L'avventura* (1960), which I thus set aside, assuming that more would have been written about that movie than about any other Antonioni film. And because I wanted to deal with a non-English language film, I also set aside Antonioni's later work. Finally, and again because I didn't want to be seen as cherry picking my examples, I excluded from consideration Antonioni's early films, which are less well known than the four he made in the middle of his career, mostly starring Monica Vitti and centering, loosely, around the issue of post-War Italian anomie. These films—starting with *L'avventura* and ending with *Red Desert*—are conventionally thought of as a tetralogy, held together by theme, tone, and style. Ultimately, I decided to focus my attention on the last of the four films, thinking that, because—unlike the other three—*Red Desert* was shot in color, it would be distinctive enough to attract particular attention and would thus have more written about it than either *L'eclisse* (1962) or *La notte (1961)*, both of which are sufficiently similar to *L'avventura* that critics might have

shied away from consideration of these films for fear that whatever they had to say about either one would have been preempted by what had been said about the earlier movie. Cursory examination suggests that about the same amount of writing has been done on all three films—in other words, that analysis of the critical body of work focusing on any of them (*L'eclisse, La notte*, or *Red Desert*) would yield similar results. Whether or not exhaustive research would bear out that conclusion, I do not know.

Surprisingly, not much more has been written about *Red Desert* than has been written about *The Graduate*—in terms of sheer volume measured in page numbers, probably less. Excluding contemporary reviews, textbooks, and works that mention the Antonioni film merely in passing, there are just twenty-one texts in English that take *Red Desert* as a point of focus; and five of the twenty-one treat the film very summarily (in three to five pages).[2] Just under half of the seventeen substantive discussions of *Red Desert* occur in books about Antonioni, where at least some commentary on the film would seem to be de rigueur. Most of the remaining nine can be found in books dealing with either some aspect of Italian cinema or film color—though two make their way to Antonioni via Dante. As improbable as the claim first seems, just three journal articles in English center around discussion of *Red Desert*.

Although the amount of writing done on *Red Desert* is similar to that done on *The Graduate*, the work on Antonioni's movie strikes me as denser, more meaningfully engaged with the film text. And yet most of what has been written on *Red Desert* sheers away—for varying reasons, to varying degrees, and with varying levels of explicitness—from interpretation. Nearly half the essays, following a line started by Seymour Chatman in his seminal book on Antonioni, insist on the primacy of (to crib from Chatman's subtitle) "the surface of the world" hallowed by Antonioni's camera, the primacy, that is to say, of the image: although many make passing reference to local meanings, and although Chatman himself dedicates a chapter to the tetralogy's "Plots and Themes," the focus of these essays is on rhetoric or aesthetics, the way the film looks and feels. Putting the point most epigrammatically, Peter Bondanella writes: "Ultimately, Antonioni's cinematographic *technique* is his content" (212). And throughout, not just in the nine essays that focus on rhetoric, but generally, the idea of *abstraction*—Antonioni's, or, alternatively, protagonist Giuliana's, "abstracting vision," in the words of Millicent Marcus (193)—becomes a dominant concern: "Antonioni uses color [in *Red Desert*]," as Angela Dalle Vacche puts the point, "to alter the nature of cinematic

language, namely to paint the world anew according to an abstract sensibility" (44). Peter Brunette, writing two years later, concurs: "color here [in *Red Desert*] becomes a kind of apotheosis of formalist *abstraction*" (91). Again, it's not that the idea of meaning entirely drops out of consideration in these studies: Dalle Vacche in particular is interested in connecting *Red Desert*'s formalist impulses to its thematic concerns. But the emphasis shifts rather dramatically to the surface, not just of the world presented by the film, but of the text itself, that is, to visual effects; and efforts like Dalle Vacche's to link what the film is doing with what it is saying are in fact exceptional. Indeed one hears a pretty steady drumbeat of resistance to the idea of textual "saying" that runs throughout the critical work on Antonioni: Chatman, for example, cites with approval a contemporary review of *L'eclisse* in which the reviewer, Richard Gilman, argues that Antonioni's films are "about nothing … about nothing *in particular*… an action and not the description of an action."[3] And a few of the critics explicitly eschew meaning-making, arguing effectively that *Red Desert* can't and/or shouldn't be read—as if thinking about the film in terms of its meaning constituted a kind of affront, a violation of the text's integrity. In the introduction to his book on Antonioni, for example, Sam Rohdie argues that "[t]he productivity of Antonioni's films does not reside in ideas" (3), the implication being that there is something sordid about the production of ideas—an attitude echoed by Stephen Snyder's claim that "Antonioni's works are anti-symbolical in spirit and go to great pains to reject the metaphor of depth" (125). "In Antonioni's films," Snyder goes on to elaborate, "there is no cult of 'hidden' meaning in the sense that some abstract truth must be detected beyond the mask of the world by the use of 'reason'" (128).[4]

Since this view of Antonioni's work is fairly prevalent, and since the argument being prosecuted by Chatman, Snyder, Rohdie and others has a bearing on issues central to this project as a whole, I want to pause briefly to consider it more carefully.

The idea that in the case of Antonioni's work nothing lies beyond or behind or beneath the surface of the text—that the significance of the text is, in a sense, immanent (an unanalyzable "thereness" available to sense or feeling)—isn't, finally, I want to argue, tenable. What all three critics really mean is that Antonioni finds value in the appearance of things. In Snyder's formulation: "The world is art for those who have eyes to see" (128). But that point—which is clearly an idea, and an abstract one at that—doesn't, in fact can't, simply lie on the surface of the text (presumably vibrating

there unspoken and unspeakable, with the viewer resonating inarticulately to that vibration). It is, rather, a point that Snyder sees the film as expressing; and its articulation derives from a complex series of interactions—among various elements of the film (the use of color, focus, mise-en-scene in this frame and that sequence; the presentation of Giuliana as a character sensitive to the world's surfaces), and between the critic or viewer and the film text. It is a synthetic construction, an interpretation of what the film communicates, what it means. And while Chatman, Snyder, and Rohdie all insist, in the case of Antonioni films in general and of *Red Desert* in particular, that there is no real distinction between container and contained—that the content of the film, its value or significance, just *is* its appearance; and while they all resist some aspect of the conceptual framework of interpretation, they all inevitably resort to ideas, and to notions of meaning and realms beyond the pure surface of the text (whatever metaphor we use to invoke this beyond, which is really just the space of complex interactions referred to above)—because, I would submit, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to talk about something mattering without invoking the conceptual frameworks of meaning and meaning making—without, that is, undertaking an interpretation.

And all three critics do—in more-or-less submerged ways, and in a sense despite themselves—proffer readings of non-self-apparent meanings of *Red Desert*: Snyder, as noted, that the film celebrates the surface beauty of the world; Rohdie, that the film, like all Antonioni's movies, invites examination of the processes of perception ("It is the split between 'reality' and 'image' which Antonioni emphasises and simultaneously condenses in the external, objective yet self-regarding look of the camera in which the look becomes the object of its own gaze"[175]); Chatman, that *Red Desert*, like the other films of the tetralogy, centers around a set of thematic preoccupations—the modern "malady of emotional life" (56), "sick Eros" (57), the desire for escape, failures of communication, and "distraction [as] attenuated escapism" (62)—that work in conjunction with plots, characters, settings, and style to define what we mean when we talk about an "Antonionian film" (51).

As for the work on *Red Desert* that does overtly read the film: What's most surprising to me is how few interpretive issues have been settled since the movie's appearance in 1965, how little consensus has been reached on key concerns: the film's take on the protagonist's neurotic sensibility and its attitude toward the modern, technologically oriented and commerce driven world it represents. Giuliana (Monica Vitti) is out of phase with her

environment and sufficiently unhappy to have attempted suicide. On her husband Ugo's (Carlo Chionetti) account, she has been unable to engage, to "get into gear," since her breakdown; and as we see her she is fragile, unsure of herself, hyper-sensitive—a kind of ambulatory exposed nerve. The world Giuliana inhabits is dominated by mechanized production, global trade, by men doing business. The setting is an industrial wasteland: tar-like canals; fields of smoldering slag; unnaturally colored, poisoned pools of water; screeching, pounding, belching machines that dwarf the humans that work in, on, and around them. The central interpretive questions arise from the fact that *Red Desert*'s highly stylized mode of presentation—the regular flattening of depth of field by telephoto lens; the notoriously intensive manipulations of color—suggests that we're seeing the filmed environment through the lens of Giuliana's neurotic sensibility. Is the problem then Giuliana, whose vision of her environment may well be distorted, and who therefore needs to adjust herself somehow to her world? Or is the problem the bourgeois, capitalist, male-dominated culture depicted, which may be producing Giuliana's distress, and which is itself, then, in need of change?

This central tension in the text is complicated by two further factors, one internal to the film, one external. The internal factor has to do with the (potentially) inconsistent representation of the industrial landscape that serves as setting for *Red Desert*. Through much of the film, that landscape comes across just as I have depicted it above—as nightmarish: Dante's own city turned into modern inferno. Near the outset of the movie, for example, Giuliana ducks behind a hedgerow of brambles and tangled brush to wolf down a sandwich she has just bought from a factory worker. After a moment, she looks up, and we are invited to survey with her (through a long pan and series of quick cuts representing her point of view) a terrain as bleak as any ever imagined—an expansive field, entirely black, covered with black trash, and extruding a smoldering, molten, shit-like substance. Moments later, after she is rejoined by her son Valerio (Valerio Bartoleschi) and the two continue to make their way to the factory owned by Ugo, the film cuts to a still shot of another part of the charred field, a burning pile of rubbish in the foreground, a tangle of grey pipes and smokestacks in the distance, the immense size of both of which is revealed after a few seconds by the emergence of two tiny human figures, Giuliana and Valerio, at the right edge of the screen (Image 4.1).

There are, however, a few brief moments in the movie when—mainly by means of close-up—the geometric shapes and bright colors associated

Image 4.1 A world of waste

with industrial production get deployed in the production of frames of abstract art: Giuliana, waiting on a platform at sea for her husband's friend Corrado (Richard Harris) to return from a ship where he has been making business arrangements, traces a black pipe as it zigzags its way up and around the platform; and any frame in that panning shot might be mistaken for a print of a painting from the *De Stijl* movement. Corrado, moments later, addresses a group of workers he wants to recruit for a project in Patagonia. Distracted, he lets his eyes wander to a blue band painted on the inside of the factory and for moments we might be looking at something from Barnett Newman. A frame from a scene in Guiliana's shop evokes Rothko (Image 4.2).

The external factor complicating the history of criticism on *Red Desert* is that Antonioni himself early on weighed in on the question of the film's relation to modernity and its presentation of its main character, Giuliana. In at least two different interviews published the month of the film's Italian release, Antonioni insisted that he was, in his words, "not against progress,"[5] that "[i]t's too simplistic to say—as many people have done—that I am condemning the human industrial world which oppresses the individuals and leads them to neurosis,"[6] that he in fact found real beauty in the factory-dominated landscape around Ravenna, and that "Giuliana's

Image 4.2 Spots of beauty

problem" was her inability to adapt, a failure caused by her connection to "ways of life that are now out-of-date" ("The Night," 288).

A few of the movie's critics either reiterate or recast Antonioni's position. Thus Peter Bondanella, referring to "Antonioni's positive evaluation of modern industrial society," simply notes that "Antonioni believes that Giuliana's neurosis is not the result of her supposedly dehumanized and hostile surroundings" (218). Murray Pomerance, more succinctly still, argues that "Antonioni does not regard modernity with nostalgia" (73). Dalle Vacche sees Antonioni as exploiting, for artistic purposes, the devastated landscape of the modern city: "Antonioni regards the industrial pollution of Ravenna as a positive experiment rather than just as a negative catastrophe, for the odd alterations of water and grass at the level of color produce a whole new set of emotional and artistic possibilities" (69). And Karl Schoonover, citing both the comment Antonioni made in conversation with Godard and the sentence from Dalle Vacche quoted above, argues that for Antonioni "an overly industrialized landscape is unavoidable" (248).

From this perspective, *Red Desert* is about—in Antonioni's own words—Giuliana's "inability to adapt to the modern world," about the need to re-invent human psychology and morality so that people better fit the world their minds have created: "Giuliana," he says, "cannot adapt to

the 'new' way of life and she goes through a crisis, while her husband, on the other hand, is content with his lot in life…. I'm not against progress. But there are people who, by their nature, by their moral makeup, have to wrestle with the modern world and can't manage to adapt to it. And thus we witness a sort of process of natural selection: the ones who survive are those who manage to keep up with progress, while the others disappear, swallowed up by their crises. Because progress is inexorable" ("Red Desert," 285).

The problem with this position, as Ian Cameron and Robin Wood long ago pointed out, is that it isn't easy to square with the film text, many of whose main features militate against such a view.[7] First, there is the fact that, while the industrial landscape of the movie is beautifully shot, that landscape is not itself rendered beautiful. Far from it. Except for the rare moments of abstraction mentioned above, where we are looking, not at a world but a visual detail excised from that world and thus decontextualized, the factories and their effects as we see them in *Red Desert* are hideous.[8] The modern industrial zone in Ravenna is inhuman and death-oriented. Second, the characters who, on this pro-industrialization account, serve as models of healthy adjustment—the men generally, Ugo and Valerio particularly—come across as monsters. Ugo is insensitive and soulless, as much an automaton as the creepy robot his son plays with; and Valerio is a brat, unconcerned about and unapologetic for the suffering he causes his mother by pretending to be paralyzed. Corrado, whose dissatisfactions align him with Giuliana and her neurosis, and who thus seems more sensitive than the oblivious and obtuse Ugo, nonetheless gets presented as a brute, who exploits Giuliana for sympathy and sex. And Max (Aldo Grotti), presumably the film's most successful industrialist, gets described by his wife's friend Mili (Rita Renoir) as "a vulture, always ready to swoop down on a factory in bankruptcy or a woman in distress." As Cameron and Wood note, given these exemplars, "[a]djustment becomes synonymous with insentience" (115). In the case of a character with a sensibility like Giuliana's, and given the ugliness of the world she inhabits, it is hard to see how adjusting could differ meaningfully from just giving up.

Given the difficulties accommodating Antonioni's stated intentions, it is not perhaps surprising that a few critics simply ignore his comments to argue for seeing the film as unambiguous indictment of modernity. In an essay focused on the uses to which Antonioni puts the associations called to mind by the film's setting in Ravenna, Victoria Kirkham argues, for example, that *Red Desert* produces a kind of embittered nostalgic

awareness of the grandeurs of Ravenna's history by evoking but minimizing (or suppressing) explicit reference to that history: "At the start of the credits, the very first frame of the film shows us, against that yellow, polluted air, the pines of Ravenna. We see only their tops, not the trunks. Visually, they have been uprooted, just as in history they are dying. Sickly remnants of Dante's Edenic *pineta* [pine forest], they give the film its master establishing shot. … Here rises a modern-day Ravenna that we cannot visit without remembering what it replaces—the other, older Byzantine city, Dante's Ravenna, and the *pineta* that has lasted as long as the monuments, all surviving in the merest verbal and visual traces, fragments of the implied setting and off-screen landscape" (125). For Kirkham, there is nothing even remotely redeemable about the modern world as presented in *Red Desert*. So, too, for R. Bruce Elder, who sees the "technological culture" of Antonioni's film, not "simply as opposed to tradition," but "also and more fundamentally … as at odds with that which we need to be fully human" (3). And although Bart Testa resists what he calls the "strong temptation" to "regard [*Red Desert*] … as Antonioni's *Inferno*," instead presenting it as a modern version of the *Purgatorio*, the space of endless transition that this purgatory becomes, given the absence, in a secular world, of a *Paradiso* to transition to, seems hardly better than hell. And, indeed, the reason Testa argues for resisting the temptation to see the film as modern *Inferno* is that succumbing to that temptation would be "too reassuring" (376).

None of the writers who take this more pessimistic tack regarding Antonioni's representation of technologized modernity really attempts to confront the potential problems posed by *Red Desert*'s complicated narrative perspective, which Pasolini—the first to attend to the issue—describes as "a 'free indirect point-of-view shot' [the rough equivalent of literature's free indirect discourse] that coincides with the entire film" (179). That is to say, everything we see in *Red Desert*, according to Pasolini, gets channeled by or through Giuliana's disturbed sensibility, even when the film is not directly presenting what she sees. Pasolini's focus is the heightened, self-conscious aestheticization of the images, the "obsessive framing" that turns the film into a series of discrete pictures designed to render for the viewer "the actual, distressing, autonomous beauty of things" (179). But the effect is clearest, most pronounced, in the recurrent manipulations of color that are tied to, but that don't technically represent, Giuliana's perspective. In one well-known sequence, for example, Giuliana takes a seat next to a street vendor's cart and everything in the shot except for Giuliana

herself—the chair Giuliana sits on, the wall behind the cart, the cart itself, the fruits and vegetables and containers on it, the barrel the vendor is using as a stove, the pan he cooks with, the food being cooked, the vendor's clothes, even his face—is some shade of gray. And since we are looking at Giuliana in this shot, we can't—at least in any technical sense—be looking with her. But her feeling tone—it's made clear during the scene (indeed she admits as much to Corrado) that she's exhausted, overwrought—is effectively coloring everything we see. Similarly, after she and Corrado have sex, the hotel room they are in and everything in it has been washed a pale, sickly pink, as if the bright pink stain Giuliana had hallucinated just prior to the sex (a vision presented clearly as an hallucination) had somehow leached into the whole of the world. Giuliana's perspective, the film's perspective, and thus the viewer's perspective, are all made, as Pasolini suggests, to coincide. Given her evident psychological instability, how do we find a purchase, some *point d'appui* from which a commentary on the world—critical or otherwise—might be launched? (Image 4.3).

Only one critic addresses this central question directly: "the film's expressive use of color and out-of-focus shots …. leads one," Brunette notes, "to ask what might be called the 'Caligari question': Whose point of view is being expressed here?" (95). But Brunette never answers the question he raises, seemingly content to let the conflicting elements of the

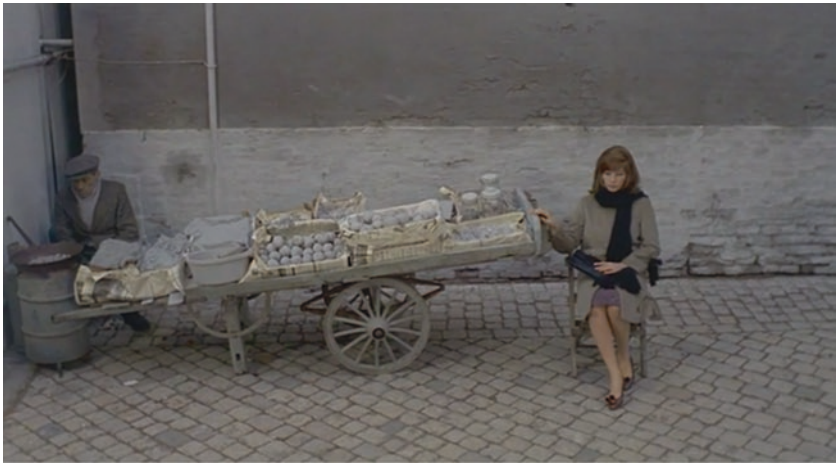

Image 4.3 Seeing the world through Giuliana's feeling tone

movie hang in a kind of colloidal suspension of ambiguity. And no one else, as I have said, seems particularly concerned.[9] Those who see the film as critical of modernity ignore the issue of narrative point of view. And those who recognize the film's interest in rendering subjective experience through style chalk the issue up to Antonioni's expressionism and leave it at that. "[T]he director," Bondanella flatly puts the point, "employs color to represent Guiliana's subjective states" (220). Chatman elaborates: "The connection between figurative and literal reality is eroded. Antonioni's camera makes us see as [Giuliana] does: the strangely whitened street and hotel lobby, the sinister look of friends in the swirling fog, the saturated colors and incomprehensible shapes of huge machines and equipment" (84). And, again, in these accounts, the problem the film is taking up is Giuliana's neurosis, her failure to adjust.

The point I want to emphasize is that all of these basic observations—that *Red Desert* strongly suggests a critique of a commerce-oriented, technological modernity, that much of the film, if not the whole of it, reflects Giuliana's perspective, and that tension gets generated by presenting a critique from the point of view of a neurotic—were in place in 1968. Like Giuliana, who ends the film where she began, commentary keeps returning to the same spot. Or, rather, spots—since it is not just positions on the film's attitude toward setting and protagonist that keep getting restaged.

How, for example, are we to understand the tale Giuliana tells her son to distract him during what she thinks of as the onset of an illness? The scene is an important set piece, and most who have written about *Red Desert* have something to say about the episode. But all of the discussion boils down to the regular reiteration of two basic, contradictory positions. Kirham, Elder, Snyder, and Marcus all argue for the vitality of Giuliana's vision, for seeing the fairy tale or fantasy sequence as representing a legitimate point of opposition to the ravages of modern Ravenna. In Marcus's formulation: "It is against this myth of primal unity and concord that Antonioni asks us to judge the rest of the film, to take the true measure of its alienation and abstraction" (202). Brunette, Bondanella, Pomerance, Testa, Chatman, William Arrowsmith, and Angelo Restivo all emphasize the mythiness—that is, the falseness—of the vision, seeing the story as escapist fantasy. "We might regard [the sequence]," as Testa puts it, "as a pathetically earnest parody of *Paradiso*" (380). All of these critics see the same scene; their descriptions, in fact, echo one another. What differs is what each sees as the film's basic attitude toward what it depicts. And, again, these positions just keep getting re-articulated.

A similar set of practiced oppositions governs critical discussion of *Red Desert*'s concluding moments. Giuliana is once again walking with Valerio through the ruined landscape near her husband's factory where we saw her at the outset, Valerio asking questions about some of its odd features. Why, he wants to know, does a pipe spit steam every few seconds. "Why is that smoke yellow?" "Because it's poisonous," his mother replies. "You mean," he wonders, pointing, "if a little birdie flies there, it will die?" "The little birdies know by now," Giuliana says. "They don't fly there anymore." We see a shot of cooling and holding tanks, pipes discharging their bilious yellow smoke. Strident, atonal music returns to the soundtrack as Giuliana contemplates something that for us is out of focus, that strikes initially as a bit of abstract painting, a canvas by de Kooning, maybe, but that ultimately resolves into a yard filled with multicolored drums of industrial waste. And on this image the film ends. Bondanella, Marcus, Snyder, Arrowsmith, Elder, and Ned Rifkin find some element of redemption in this conclusion—mostly in the felt sense that Giuliana has found her way, again in Marcus's words, "to her own truce with the environment" (207).[10] But the idea of Giuliana adjusting to a world depicted in such negative terms—where globalized capitalism is producing a generally felt sense of alienation and dislocation, where living well materially is predicated on degrading the environment, where meaningful emotional connections are next to non-existent—is, as noted, problematic on its surface. As Brunette, echoing Cameron and Wood, pointedly remarks, "[W]hat would it mean for [Giuliana] to become better adjusted to a world that looks like this and in which people act as they did in the shack? In this world … any victory at adapting, at fitting in, will inevitably also be a defeat" (108). So, along with Brunette and Cameron and Wood, Pomerance and Testa see the film's ending as emphasizing stasis or paralysis. As Testa puts it: "The closing sequence closes a circle with the first, and Giuliana is at the portal of Purgatory again. Time will not stop" (181).

Surely one reason the history of criticism on *Red Desert* seems sort of stuck is that the critics aren't in very effective dialogue with one another. A few of these authors cite other authors—Restivo cites Dalle Vacche; Dalle Vacche cites Arrowsmith; Marcus cites Cameron and Wood—but mostly to identify points of departure for analysis or to drag in some corroborating testimony. There is very little engagement with opposed readings. And thus one gets very little sense in these essays of there being established points of contention that remain to be hashed out. I can only speculate about the causes for the lack of dialog and dialectic, but my

guess is that the totality of writing on *Red Desert* just isn't extensive enough to be thought of as a *body of work*, so there is no felt need to consult and confront it. In a larger field—all extant efforts at understanding, say, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (a text published twenty-three years after *Red Desert* was released and about which much, much more has been written)[11]—such consultation and confrontation would simply be understood to be the price of admission to the discussion. In the case of Antonioni's film, it seems, earlier interpretations can be pretty safely ignored and issues can be addressed as if for the very first time.

By way of suggesting how discussion of one of these central interpretive concerns—the relation between the film's troubled point of view and its depiction of modernity—might, in dialectical fashion, be nudged forward, I want briefly to consider a point of comparison. Like *Red Desert*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wall-Paper" concerns a young, middle-class mother suffering through a mental breakdown. Like the movie, the story sets its protagonist in opposition to a culture and society dominated by men and defined as rationalist, scientific—modern. Because the narrative point of view is first person (we have a kind of impossible access to the events by means of a kind of impossible diary), and because the narrator is mentally ill, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," like Antonioni's film, and for related reasons, raises questions about narrative reliability. And yet no one who has written about the Gilman story (needless to say, at this point, that the body of work addressing "The Yellow Wall-Paper" is an order of magnitude larger than that addressing *Red Desert*)[12] has argued for ignoring the increasingly critical cast of the narrator's depiction of her world—for chalking the negativity of that portrait up, in other words, to the narrator's psychosis. No one, for example, has made a case for seeing the narrator's husband John as nicer than he seems to be, or for seeing the story as having nothing really to say about the rigidity of gender roles in nineteenth-century America. And although the story's *efficacy* as social criticism is a point of contestation, nearly everyone understands the story to be an effort at social criticism.

Most readers of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," on the other hand, acknowledge the narrative's unreliability. Analysis doesn't break down—as it does in the case of *Red Desert*—into an either/or opposition where the critic, divorcing the issue of narrative unreliability from the issue of social critique, effectively chooses to deal with one or the other. Most readers, in fact, see the narrator's unreliability—and the madness that gives rise to it—as a vehicle for the social criticism: the mental illness and unreliability,

that is, are effects of, and serve as commentary on, the narrator's social environment. The story's method is her madness, which serves not only as condition of possibility for her "fantasies of entrapment and liberation,"[13] but as affront and challenge to the masculinist, emotion-suppressing, reason-oriented world view of her scientist/physician husband. As Carol Margaret Davison observes, "The narrator's complex vision of the horrors of patriarchy in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is only matched by the final complex and horrific vision of the senseless and crawling, infantile narrator in a posture that literalizes what she has implied is woman's position in America … She imaginatively transforms an infantilizing, imprisoning 'asylum' into a place of refuge. … Given her perceptive analysis of late nineteenth-century American patriarchy, as delineated in her creative journal, Gilman's narrator may be said to be never so sane as when she appears the most insane."[14]

Adopting something like the both/and framework that typifies critical discussion of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" might, I want to suggest, open new avenues of inquiry in the case of *Red Desert*. Rather than focusing on either the potential unreliability of the narrative and the issue of Giuliana's illness, or the potentially critical cast of the film's depiction of modernity—or, taking a third tack, conceiving of these two features of the film as antithetical and thus incoherent or ambiguous—we could see the subjective, slightly unhinged presentation as intimately tied to the critique: that is to say, the super-sensitized, aestheticizing vision that governs representation in the case of *Red Desert*, like the instability of the first person perspective of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," can be seen as both symptom of and symbolic response to the ugliness, the oppressiveness, the ruinous logic—the lethal rationality—of the physical setting and social order portrayed.

Giuliana's illness, that is to say, is as much a consequence as a cause of what we see: she has been—the film, it seems to me, makes clear—made sick by her environment, by the physical, social, and economic matrices in which she is enmeshed. Giuliana is repeatedly shown, for example, registering the depressing visual hideousness of industrial Ravenna. As noted previously, we watch her at the outset taking in the slagheap outside her husband's factory. Later, we watch her watch in quiet puzzlement the uncanny spectacle of a massive ship sliding past a stand of pines, its presence in the woods a seeming impossibility, a violation of her (and our) understanding of the natural world. As her husband and companions drift off to take lunch in a fishing cabin, Giuliana stands, her back to the camera, looking down at a pool of polluted water in a marsh, stained a putrid

looking yellow-green. Near the end of the film, looking perhaps to run away, she heads down to the port where we see her for a moment examine the oil- and refuse-covered water near the dock. All of these moments ask us to register Giuliana's sensitivity to the ugliness of her world.

But we are also continually confronted with Giuliana's attempts to negotiate the horrors of, not just her physical, but her social environment, horrors that are grounded in her marked marginality as an upper middle class woman. Despite—indeed in part because of—the relative ease of her existence, Giuliana is essentially irrelevant to the world presented. At almost no point, for example, do we see her engage in anything like purposeful activity. Mainly she wanders, alone or with Corrado, her restless movement indicating both the inconsequence of her actions and her desire for escape. She wants to do something that will give her life shape and meaning, so she has plans to open up a shop; but the desperateness and futility of the gesture are made clear by her agitation when confronting the actual business of business, the need to make phone calls, for example, and by the haziness surrounding what it is exactly that she plans to sell. Giuliana flounders in a world defined by work. And her interactions with the most significant figures in her life, all of them male, are tainted by exploitation and abuse. Early on, for example, Giuliana wakes from a nightmare feeling feverish; she wanders the house, eventually drawing the attention of Ugo, who at first dismisses her concerns, then tries to initiate sex. Near the end of the movie, in a parallel scene, she runs to Corrado's hotel in a panic, wanting to talk. "Help me," she pleads with him. "Help me, please. I'm afraid I just won't make it. I'm scared." Corrado's response to her distress, like Ugo's, is to exploit it for sex. Sandwiched between these two moments of emotional betrayal is another: Giuliana's son, who is clearly as well adjusted to the modern world as is his father, tortures his mother, apparently on a whim, by pretending to have become paralyzed.

The traumas of the social environment, moreover, clearly extend beyond the local. The various destabilizations wrought by an increasingly globalized capitalism are, that is, a central source of anxiety for Giuliana. It's not just that globalization is radically altering the landscape in terrifying ways, but that the globalized economy is bringing uncertainty and danger. Giuliana is clearly distressed by the kinds of economically fueled dislocations that are leading Corrado to leave for Patagonia, for example. She worries about the dislocations themselves—about which she says to Corrado, "It shouldn't be like that"—but she also worries about the changes that such movements can produce: "And the things and people

you leave behind" she asks, "will they be there when you go back? And will they be the same?" When the ship carrying contagion silently, mysteriously slides up to Max's erstwhile fishing shack, Giuliana is thrown into a hysterical, perhaps even suicidal, panic. What she wants are security and stability: if she were required to move away, she tells Corrado, she would bring everyone and everything with her. Later, again in a panic, she says to him, "You know what I'd like? I'd like everyone who's ever cared about me here around me now, like a wall." At the emotional level, this dread of instability on her part registers as a feeling—one she initially, in explaining it to Corrado, attributes to someone else—"like there was no ground beneath her… like she was sliding down a slope … sinking, always on the verge of drowning, with nothing around her." She dreams, she tells Ugo, of sinking into quicksand. Visually, that dread gets expressed by the dissolution of the image—all those shots of solid shapes rendered spectral by being out of focus. That idea—of a world dissolving—takes dramatic form when Giuliana stands watching her husband and her friends slowly, one by one, disappear into the fog.[15] The sequence is a remarkably summary expression of modernist angst about mutability. And the whole of the film functions as poignant commentary on globalization's capacity for erasing distinctions, for annihilating the particular, for destroying individual places, communities, relations.

These currents collectively play too prominent a part in the film to be ignored or dismissed. And the cogent social criticism they express isn't belied by—but rather develops out of—Giuliana's neurosis, which is not only an effect of, but a response to, the problems she perceives. The stunning visual texture of *Red Desert*, its pictorial interest and beauty, in other words, in a sense answers the ugliness and fatuousness and brutality of the world it presents.

As everyone who has had occasion to discuss *Red Desert* at one point or other attests, the film is lovely to look at—ravishing really. I have already mentioned a few of those moments that evoke abstract painting. But what Chatman notes of Antonioni's work generally—that "[m]any of his frames are worth enlarging and exhibiting as independent works of art" (114)—is especially true in the case of *Red Desert*, nearly every frame of which rewards sustained attention.

Again, however, what is beautiful, what is compelling in *Red Desert* is not the world presented; what is beautiful are the film's forms of presentation. Since this is a fairly tricky point, I need to make some distinctions. I am not making the case here—as Snyder does—that *Red Desert* is trying

to show the viewer that the world itself is beautiful if we look at it the right way. The movie's vision is not, in other words, restorative. Rather, it is compensatory: *Red Desert*, in its beauty, is making up for the ugliness, the tawdriness of the world depicted. For the process to work, for the viewer to experience a sense of compensation, s/he has somehow to register *both* the deficiencies of the world as found *and* the felicities of the film's ways of looking. The beauty is in the art that is applied to the world, not the world itself. Another point of comparison might help: at the end of *Taxi Driver* (1976), as Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) sits wounded and bleeding, bathed in the blood of the several men he's just killed, as Iris (Jodie Foster) huddles and weeps, the camera suddenly shifts to an overhead shot of the carnage. It pans slowly through the room, over the body of the owner of the seedy hotel where the gruesome shootings have taken place, over the heads of the newly arrived police officers, down the blood smeared stairwell, past a gun, more blood, another gun, the bloodied body of Sport (Harvey Keitel) the pimp, then out into the garbage-filled street, where, in slow motion, we see a crowd of gawkers building, the camera continuing to rise, drifting slowly away as more police, then medics, arrive. The content of the scene is anything but lovely; and yet this long tracking shot is in its own way gorgeous, the camera's comment on the hideous violence it must record. The world in *Taxi Driver* is grotesque, repulsive, fallen; the film's manner of engaging that world, however, provides compensation, a sense that the dirty, violent world we see is not all there is. Art—the beauties of framing, composition, color—responds to, makes up for, the deficiencies of life. Writing about film noir, Paul Schrader, who provided the script for Scorsese's film, makes an analogous point: "Because *film noir* was first of all a style, because it worked out its conflicts visually rather than thematically, because it was aware of its own identity, it was able to create artistic solutions to sociological problems."[16] The sentiment—which applies as much to *Taxi Driver* as it does to any of the films Schrader references in his article—is modernist in spirit, expressing a view of the function of art that Eliot, Joyce, Frost, and Hemingway, for all their differences, would surely have endorsed.

It is, I want to suggest, a view shared by *Red Desert*. In the case of Antonioni's film, however, the compensatory function of art, the film's redemptive, aestheticizing vision, can't be disengaged from its protagonist's "sick" perceptions, which can't, in turn, be disengaged from the film's social criticism.

Notes

1. Peter Brunette, "*Deserto Rosso / Red Desert*: Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964," *The Cinema of Italy*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), p. 153.
2. Search Conducted June-September, 2015. See Ian Cameron and Robin Wood, "Red Desert," *Antonioni* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 111–24, hereafter cited in text; Ned Rifkin, "Color," *Antonioni's Visual Language* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1977), 93–115; Peter Bondanella, "The Mature Auteurs: New Dimensions in Film Narrative with Visconti, Antonioni, and Fellini," *Italian Neo-Realism to the Present* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1983), 196–252, hereafter cited in text; Seymour Chatman, "The Great Tetralogy," *Antonioni: or, the Surface of the World* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985), 51–135, hereafter cited in text; Millicent Marcus, "Antonioni's *Red Desert*: Abstraction As the Guiding Idea," *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 188–207, hereafter cited in text; Sam Rohdie, *Antonioni* (London: BFI, 1990), hereafter cited in text; R. Bruce Elder, "Antonioni's Tragic Vision: Style, Form and Idea in the Films of Michelangelo Antonioni, with Especial Emphasis on His Masterpiece, *Il deserto rosso*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies (Revue canadienne d'études cinématographiques)* 1.2 (1991), 1–34, hereafter cited in text; Stephen Snyder, "Antonioni: Cubist Vision in *Red Desert*," *The Transparent I: Self/Subject in European Cinema* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 125–37, hereafter cited in text; William Arrowsmith, "Red Desert," *Antonioni: The Poet of Images*, ed. Ted Perry (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 85–105; Angela Dalle Vacche, "Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*: Painting as Ventriloquism and Color as Movement," *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1996), 43–80; Peter Brunette, "*Red Desert*," *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 90–108, hereafter cited in text; Angelo Restivo, "The Sublime and the Disaster," *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002), 124–43; Victoria Kirkham, "The Off-Screen Landscape: Dante's Ravenna and Antonioni's *Red Desert*," *Dante, Cinema, and Television*, ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004), 106–28, hereafter cited in text; Bart Testa, "Dante and Cinema: Film across a Chasm," *Dante and the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression*, ed. James Miller (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2005), 367–93, hereafter cited in text; Paul Coates, "Red and White: *Red Desert*," *Cinema and Color: The Saturated Image* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 74–77; Marga Cottino-Jones, "Women and Men as Victims of Violence and Alienation in the films of the

1960s: Antonioni's *L'avventura, La Notte, L'eclissi* [sic], and *Il deserto rosso*," *Women, Desire, and Power in Italian Cinema* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 119–25; Alessia Ricciardi, "Becoming Woman: From Antonioni to Anne Carson and Cindy Sherman," *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 56 (2010), 6–23; Murray Pomerance, "The *Red Desert*," *Michelangelo Red Antonioni Blue: Eight Reflections on Cinema* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2011), 70–110, hereafter cited in text; Karen Pinkus, "Antonioni's Cinematic Poetics of Climate Change," *Antonioni: Centenary Essays*, ed. Laura Rascaroli and John David Rhodes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 254–75; John David Rhodes, "Antonioni and the Development of Style," *Antonioni: Centenary Essays*, 276–300; Karl Schoonover, "Antonioni's Waste Management," *Antonioni: Centenary Essays*, 235–53, hereafter cited in text.

A simple title search would suggest that there are three more essays in the critical body of work dealing with *Red Desert* than I have listed above, two by Dalle Vacche and one by Brunette. But these are all in some sense retreads: the two by Dalle Vacche excise and reprint different parts of the essay listed above; the essay by Brunette, presented in a volume designed to canvas and introduce the whole of Italian cinema (and cited in n. 1 above), summarizes and cribs from the longer piece published in his book on Antonioni. For the Dalle Vacche reprints, see "Antonioni's *Red Desert*," *Post-War Cinema and Modernity: a Film Reader*, ed. John Orr and Olga Taxidou (New York: New York UP, 2001), 318–32; and "Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*: Painting as Ventriloquism and Color as Movement (Architecture and Painting)," *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 183–91.

Some mention should perhaps be made of Pasolini's treatment of *Red Desert* in his essay on "The 'Cinema of Poetry.' As important as Pasolini's remarks have proven to be, they in fact take up only a couple paragraphs of the essay, which concerns itself, not so much with specific texts, but with film as discourse. See Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The 'Cinema of Poetry,'" *Heretical Empiricism*, 2nd ed., tr. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett, ed. Louise K. Barnet (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2005), 167–86, hereafter cited in text.

It is worth noting that neither Chatman nor Rohdie dedicates a specific essay to discussion of *Red Desert*. Chatman does accord considerable time and attention to the film, but only in the context of discussing the tetralogy as a whole. Rohdie takes up discussion of the film in passing, devoting perhaps a dozen pages of his book on Antonioni to consideration of *Red Desert*.

The five cursory analyses of *Red Desert* are the essays by Bondanella, Coates, Cottino-Jones, Schoonover, and Testa.

3. Richard Gilman, "About Nothing—with Precision," *Theater Arts* 46.7 (1962), 11; cited in Chatman, p. 54.
4. The skepticism of reason signaled by putting the word in quotes underscores the latent romanticism undergirding a lot of the criticism of making movies mean—and, I would say, of a lot of postmodern thought just generally considered.
5. Michelangelo Antonioni, "Red Desert," Interview by François Maurin, tr. Andrew Taylor, *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema-Michelangelo Antonioni*, ed. Marga Cottino-Jones (New York: Marsilio, 1996), p. 285, hereafter cited in text.
6. Michelangelo Antonioni, "The Night, The Eclipse, The Dawn," Interview by Jean-Luc Godard, tr. Andrew Taylor, *The Architecture of Vision*, p. 287, hereafter cited in text.
7. See Cameron and Wood, 115: "From Antonioni's interview it emerges that we are to see *Il deserto rosso* as being about Giuliana's failure to adjust to the society in which she lives…But the minor characters, it appears, are to be seen as adjusted to various degrees, and we are to accept them as representing a healthy normality from which Giuliana deviates. It seems to me impossible to do this: the film precisely reverses its creator's intentions."
8. A case can be made that the out-of-focus shots of the factories that accompany the opening credit sequence make the factories look beautiful. But I don't think so. There is beauty in that opening sequence, but only when the factories are unrecognizable as factories and become abstract shapes. The opening credit sequence seems to me in fact to epitomize the tensions that run through the text. When the factories are recognizable as factories, the images are unsettling, especially when accompanied by the harsh, discordant electronic sounds that Antonioni uses throughout to evoke Giuliana's felt sense of her environment. But those shots are intercut with shots that are almost purely abstract and visually compelling. And the soundtrack includes not just the electronic sounds but the operatic piece that also plays during Giuliana's recounting to Valerio of the Edenic tale of the girl on the island. How all this is meant to cut isn't obvious.
9. Pomerance cites just this passage from Brunette but doesn't frame the issue as one concerning point of view. For Pomerance, the question Brunette asks mainly serves to reinforce a misguided romanticism that characterizes the criticism of the film, which tilts, on Pomerance's account, toward seeing the film as critical of modernity. See Pomerance, p. 78.
10. Neither Elder nor Arrowsmith see Giuliana as adjusting to better accommodate the modern world. Both see her as achieving a clearer sense of her self and her situation, of gaining, in Elder's formulation, a kind of authenticity of being in the existentialist sense: "Does Antonioni's view of time and human existence imply that he believes that human life is beyond any

sort of redemption? In a sense, it does. However, Antonioni does propose a kind of salvation. This salvation consists not in achieving peace and happiness, not in moving beyond anxiety and despair, but in achieving a certain mode of Being, an authentic mode" (Elder, p. 23).

11. As of August 2016, the MLA database has 585 listings (in English) for Morrison's novel.
12. As of August 2016, the MLA database lists 170 entries (in English) for "The Yellow Wall-Paper."
13. The phrase is from Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," *New Literary History* 11.3 (1980), 455.
14. Carol Margaret Davison, "Haunted House/Haunted Heroine: Female Gothic Closets in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *Women's Studies* 33.1 (2004), 66–67.
15. While doing unrelated work, I recently (February 2020) stumbled across an article on *Red Desert* that my earlier research hadn't turned up and whose title speaks to just these points: Matthew Gandy, "Landscapes of Deliquescence in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28.2 (2003), 218–37. Aimed at situating the movie, generally, in the broader context of cultural discourses on modernity and modernism and, more specifically, within a "genealogy of landscape aesthetics" (231), the article doesn't really aim at offering an interpretation of Antonioni's film (I rather imagine the writer would see such an effort as reflecting profound theoretical naivety). But it does address some of the tensions I have been trying to highlight, seeing the movie, finally, as ambivalent about the modern world it depicts. My belated discovery of this essay can perhaps serve as signaling the difficulties involved in trying to track down everything written in English on a given film. If the essay or book chapter hasn't been indexed, if it isn't cited by other writers, if it has been published somewhere one had not thought to look, it might well be missed. My assumption is that there are other such works out there: I do not think their probable existence undermines the basic argument I am trying here, and throughout, to make.
16. Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," *Film Comment* 8.1 (1972), 13. I want to thank Julie Grossman for drawing this quote to my attention.

CHAPTER 5

The Work of Film Studies: An Analysis of Four Journals

The interpretation of individual film texts, I have been trying to suggest, has been less central to film scholarship than is generally assumed. The nature of the claim makes it difficult, if not impossible, to prove. What would proof in this case look like? How does one go about demonstrating that, although there has been some of a particular kind of thing, there has not been as much of it as there could or should be? In earlier chapters, I tried to make some headway toward making the claim plausible by exhaustively canvasing what had been written about four well-known and historically important movies and showing that the films had too rarely been mined for meaning. In this chapter, I will try to push the plausibility of the claim a little further along by exhaustively surveying—at different, often overlapping, historical moments and for varying periods of time—everything that was published in four prominent film journals: *Cinema Journal, Screen, Movie*, and *Wide Angle*; for what such a survey demonstrates is that for three out of four of these journals interpreting film texts is a *relatively* minor concern. The exception here, of course, is the journal *Movie*, which, from its inception to the present, has centered around the discussion of individual films. What I will be arguing, however, is that, seen against the extensive overlapping in the patterns playing out in the other three journals, *Movie* really is unusual—the exception, indeed, that proves the rule.

First, however, a few words about methodologies.

One might well wonder, why these particular journals and just these? There are, after all, many other important film journals and other venues

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_5

where film scholarship gets published—journals whose main concern is literature, or philosophy, or theory, for instance, but which occasionally, perhaps even regularly, include essays related to film studies. To respond to the second part of the question first: attempting to survey all the periodical literature that has addressed some aspect of film studies would be the project of, well, more than a lifetime. Even the less ambitious aim of surveying everything that has appeared in the dozen or so most influential and historically important film journals seems more the basis for a book than for a single chapter in one. Some selection, in short, needed to be made. My response to the first part of the question has, itself, two parts. First, as the essays collected in Lee Grieveson's and Haidee Wasson's *Inventing Film Studies* make clear, film studies as a discipline can be thought of as having many different starting points. Where, when, and with what one begins depends on the focus of one's attention. In their introduction to the book, Grieveson and Wasson start with the late 40s and early 50s, what they refer to as "a period prior to full academic institutionalization."[1] But the first chapter in the volume, Grieveson's "Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct" reaches back to 1916 and the publication of Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: a Philosophical Study*. And Chap. 2 focuses on developments in the 20s and 30s, as does a later chapter by Dana Polan.[2] One might well begin with Soviet theorizing in the 20s or with the efflorescence of film clubs, societies, and journals in France immediately after World War II. But the period stretching from 1960 to the mid-70s, when each of these four journals was founded, and which saw the proliferation of similar journals worldwide and a dramatic increase in the number of university-based film programs in the United States and England, is a conventional point of departure for a consideration of film studies as an *academic* discipline.[3] Concerning the particulars: three of the four journals seem to me to be obvious choices. As the face of what Grieveson and Wasson describe as "the central professional organization for English-language cinema studies" (xi)—that is, The Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS)—*Cinema Journal* can plausibly be taken to represent the main stream of the field. What *PMLA* is to the study of literature, *Cinema Journal* is to the study of film. Categorizing everything that has appeared in the journal from its inception in 1961 to 2015 should provide a sense of the consensus priorities of the discipline as those priorities changed over time. No historical survey of the kinds of work published in English-language film periodicals could ignore the importance of *Screen*, whose impact on the field in the late 60s

and early 70s would be hard to overestimate. As a main conduit in the English-speaking world of French film theory, and itself a central site in the elaboration of Lacanian and Althusserian-inflected ideology critique, *Screen*, exerting a kind of outsized gravitational pull, helped make theoretical inquiry a central concern of the discipline, and thus shaped the contours of academic discourse on film for decades. *Movie*, as noted above, is the one journal most associated with the kind of interpretive work that I see myself as championing and that I am arguing has been too infrequently pursued. To have left it out of consideration would have, rightly, raised concerns about the suppression of relevant evidence. Surveying the work in *Movie* thus felt obligatory. Which brings me to *Wide Angle*, a choice that was by design somewhat arbitrary. I wanted a fourth journal, an additional source of data that might serve as something like a control. To serve that purpose, it needed to be well known and well respected, and the focus of its interests could not be too narrowly defined. It had to be a journal, in other words, that published work from a variety of approaches and perspectives and in a variety of subfields. I could have chosen other journals—*Bright Lights*, for example, or *The Velvet Light Trap*, or *The Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (now *The Quarterly Review of Film and Video*). But *Wide Angle* is as plausibly representative as any of the others.

Since the conclusions I will be drawing here about the historical priorities of film studies are grounded in a series of determinations I have made about the *kinds* of scholarly work appearing in these four journals, I need to say something about how I came to make these determinations. Although my work with these journals could be described as systematic, inasmuch as I did in fact look at every piece of writing in every issue of every volume of every journal in the years, in each case, under consideration, I never developed or attempted to develop a *system* for classifying what I was reading. This work too was, I would say, interpretive. In many cases, decisions were easy. An essay describing the ways the onset of World War II affected the types and tone of the movies that Hollywood produced or an article describing how nickelodeons worked to build an audience for cinema presents itself pretty clearly as an effort at enriching our understanding of film history.[4] By the same token, Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier," a translation of which was published in *Screen* in 1975, slots unproblematically as theory—as does a response to and critique of Metz published in *Cinema Journal* a bit more than a decade later.[5] But a fair amount of film scholarship is hybrid in nature. Where does

the bulk of the weight lie in symptomatic readings of films? Is a Lacanian analysis of a given movie or movies, for example, better thought of as an application of a theory or as an interpretation of the film(s)? I would say—pace Bordwell, who argues in *Making Meaning* that film theory of this sort simply serves as cover for offering interpretations—that the answer to the question has to be pursued on a case by case basis. Although Laura Mulvey's famous essay on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," for example, first published in *Screen*, contains elements of polemic and includes moments of textual analysis, its central concern involves deploying psychoanalytic theory in order to "demonstrate[e] the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form."[6] Her abiding interest, in other words, is not interpreting the films she mentions but analyzing the scopic regime. I thus would characterize her essay as a work of theory rather than interpretation. Equally patent is the theoretical bent of D. N. Rodowick's response to Mulvey in *Wide Angle*, where he argues for a more complex understanding and account of both sexual difference and the processes of identification in cinema.[7] By contrast, when Clifford T. Manlove takes up a consideration of Mulvey's work in an essay in *Cinema Journal* in 2007, he spends nearly half his time analyzing the three Hitchcock films Mulvey had used as primary examples. In such a case, I would count the essay as both theory and interpretation.[8] In some instances, however, the bulk of the weight falls on the film, not the theory: sometimes the theory meaningfully informs the reading; other times, to round out the accounting on this point, the theoretical trappings are just that, trappings, a means of adding a bit of gravitas—more particularly, a bit of institutionally approved significance—to what is really just a reading of a film. In either of these latter cases, I would categorize the work as interpretive.

Related sorts of problems occur in essays that join history and interpretation. Indeed, with the "historical turn" that marked both literary and film studies in the 80s and 90s, the kind of hybridity I am discussing became a matter of theoretical imperative. Here, too, one must make discriminations on a case-by-case basis by reading the essay and determining where the interest really lies. The structuralist semiotics so important to film studies in the 70s and 80s raises other concerns: much of this work focuses on individual films, and the work often pays very close attention to textual detail, but the presiding interest is not really *what* the text means but *how* it means. And it often turns out that, when what the film text means is taken into consideration, the what just is the how. Take Raymond

Bellour's Metzian analysis of Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946) for example: the meaning Bellour comes to uncover in his patient examination of a twelve-shot sequence from the film is the semiological system itself, the rhetorical functioning of classical Hollywood cinema.[9] Is the essay best thought of as a reading of the film? Or is the specific film here really just a vehicle for presenting observations about and analyses of sign systems in the cinema? Similar questions could be asked of Stephen Heath's famous "Film and System: Terms of Analysis."[10]

My point here is simply that I have tried to be judicious—that is, both careful and honest—in deciding how best to characterize the film scholarship I read in these journals. Although in many, if not most, cases the issue is unproblematic, my working assumption is that there would be room to quibble, in some instances, about how to categorize the work being done. Other people, set the same task, might well make different decisions here and there. My hope is that by offering brief outlines of the histories of these journals (for the periods of time covered), I can establish confidence in my accounting of the work and in the general conclusions I draw.

A few final observations concerning methodology: first, as noted above, I follow the journals through different, sometimes overlapping periods of time. I survey the work in *Wide Angle* throughout its existence, from its inception in 1976 to its demise in 1999. I do virtually the same in the case of *Cinema Journal*, starting with its founding in 1961 and ending in 2015, an arbitrary stopping point made necessary by the journal's ongoing existence. I cover *Screen* through the fifteen-year period of its greatest influence, from 1969, when the journal became a primary conduit of continental theory, to 1984, when the work of making theory central to film studies had largely been accomplished. I cover *Movie* from its inception in 1962 to 2000, the whole of the period during which it was edited by Ian Cameron.

Second, I would be greatly understating the case if I were simply to call the work I encountered while poring through these four journals varied. The study concerned thousands of pieces of writing—from short, casual notes to nearly book-length treatises—produced from a vast array of vantage points and with very diverse aims. Thus my research entailed creating a list of broadly defined categories to slot essays into: history, theory, interpretation, rhetoric, cultural studies, review, pedagogy, reference, and miscellaneous. Some of these are unproblematic, but some require explanation. I used the rubric *rhetoric* to characterize works concerned with how movies operate or with the affective capacities of film. Included under this

heading were essays on aesthetics and narratology, as well as studies working the seam between (non-psychoanalytic) psychology and film studies (old-line psychologizing about why, for instance, we like to watch interpretively difficult films as well as cognitivist studies that are not preponderantly theoretical or polemical).[11] A great many of the essays I read could be classed under a cultural studies/cultural materialist/new historicist heading. Such work is, as noted above, hybrid by design, negotiating the relations between various historically determinate cultural/material contexts and arrays of diverse texts. Points of emphasis vary considerably from one essay to another. Because I wanted to be clear about the status of interpretation in these essays—because, that is, I wanted to count, and account for, whatever reading of film appears in them—I classified any work an interpretation if the sustained analysis of textual detail in individual films was as important to the essay as anything else the essay contained. Those that offered some attention to individual film texts—for example, weaving references to films into analyses of larger matrixes of texts, themselves designed to serve as windows onto particular historical moments or cultural milieus—were classed either as history or as cultural studies, depending on where the weight of the analysis was being placed.[12] I used the term *review* to identify essays that offered descriptions and evaluations of movies but that provided little or no textual analysis of the films involved. Evaluative film criticism of the type associated with *Movie* I categorized as interpretation. The miscellaneous category, which in no case amounted to more than two percent of the total volume of work in a journal, was designed to cover idiosyncratic odds and ends: descriptions and explanations of, or responses to, contemporary events of concern to those involved in the study of film; polemical commentary on such events; creative pieces, and so on. Although I did take substantive review essays into account in my analysis of the material published in these journals, I bracketed—that is, set aside—straightforward reviews of books, despite the fact that the choices made at the journals concerning which books to review were often telling, serving to indicate preoccupations and trends, signaling shifts in interest or focus. As a final note, I placed interviews and personal retrospectives into the category of history, even though the contents of the interview or reminiscence might be of theoretical or rhetorical interest.

Again, there might be room to quibble about the classification of this essay or that, but for the most part the decision would have no bearing on the determination of the relative importance of interpretation to the

journals. And because I have, for the purposes of the accounting here, defined interpretation very broadly—to include not just directed readings of individual films, which are exceedingly rare in all of these journals, *Movie* included, but any sustained attention to textual detail and meaning (in, say, a response to a reading of previous readings of *Cat People*, whose central concern is less the film than the misapprehensions of the earlier essay, but which does nonetheless offer some interpretive commentary)—the danger of undercounting interpretations seems to me limited.[13]

* * *

Cinema Journal

Cinema Journal began in 1961 as the *Journal of the Society of Cinematologists*, which name it retained for its first five years, with one volume being published per year (although the series ended with a double volume for 1964/65). Through those first five years, the journal aimed at being serious, even scholarly, but not academic—by which I mean it has the feel of a middle-brow literary review. It aimed at getting film taken seriously as art by including one essay that argued the point explicitly and another that defended mainstream filmmaking as art by opposing it to avant-garde filmmaking—but mostly by situating film in relation to other arts, with essays identifying the origins of various film techniques in literature, in Japanese scroll paintings, and in cave paintings. The central concern throughout is history, with nearly half of the essays during the period (twelve of twenty-five) devoted to shedding light on cinema's past. In this five-year period, the journal included just one essay focused on textual analysis (although two reviews of movies did get published in Volume1).

The name *Cinema Journal* got adopted in 1966, a change that, as Grieveson and Wasson suggest, reflected a shift in "emphasis from those studying—cinematologists—to the object of their study" (xiii). Cinema as a field of study took on a certain weight—which increased weightiness is further marked when, in 1968, the journal doubled the number of issues per volume (from one to two).[14] In terms of content, the next fifteen or so years marked both continuities and discontinuities. History remained the presiding concern, with more than sixty percent of the essays appearing in the journal between 1966 and 1982 involved in some form of historical

analysis. In addition, three special issues of the journal were dedicated during the 70s to various aspects of cinema history.[15] The kind of work that Bordwell describes as theory with a small "t"—"middle-range" problem solving[16]—continued to be a concern of some significance: one essay analyzed the interplay (in film generally) between personal narratives, the small-scale stories of individual people, and large-scale historical forces; another looked at dissociation as a structuring principle in a number of Buñuel films; yet another examined Bergman's "attempts," in his later work, "to translate literary techniques into cinematic terms."[17] But the period also saw brief forays into lager-scale theorizing: a summary of auteur theory, coupled with an appeal for the formulation of more and better theories of film; an effort at responding to the question "What is Cinema?" by thinking through discussions of realism in the works of André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer.[18] But these forays were, in fact, brief—as well as infrequent. Aside from one article by David Cook designed to survey the contemporary theoretical terrain (with Cook in the Jonathan Culler role of presenting accessible summaries of the abstruse theorizing being done on the continent), there was almost no recognition in *Cinema Journal* at this time of the revolution in theory taking place in France and being championed, throughout this period, by critics affiliated with *Screen*.[19] The increasingly academic orientation of the journal can be felt, not only in the increasing length and complexity of the essays being published, but by the growing interest in the teaching of film.

Interpreting movies was of more interest during this period than it had been during the first five years of the journal's existence, of course, but the threshold could hardly have been lower. Between 1966 and 1982 (through Volume 21), just seventeen percent of the work published in *Cinema Journal* focused on interpretation.[20] Moreover, the range of reference was fairly narrow, the interpretive essays concentrating on European art films (there are three essays on Bergman, two on Renoir, one each on Resnais and Visconti, for example) or movies by exemplary American auteurs (three essays on Welles films, two on Ford). At the very end of the period, quite late in the game really, one starts to see essays reflecting the discipline's engagement with theory.

To the extent that interpretation ever had a heyday at *Cinema Journal*, that heyday ran through the 80s and 90s. Since the journal again doubled in size in 1982 (going from two issues per volume to four), there was just much more material being published generally during this period. But from the fall of 1982 to the fall of 1999 (from Volume 22, Number 1 to

Volume 39, Number 1), interpretive analysis accounted for just over twenty-six percent of the work published.[21] And the readings ranged much more widely than had been the case previously. Essays on films by Buñuel and Renoir, by Hitchcock and Welles, continued to crop up. But so did essays on films by Sembène and Lajmi, and by Eastwood and Spielberg. There were readings of horror films, westerns, musicals, and melodramas. The increased attention to interpretation was accompanied by an even more dramatic increase in interest in theory: between 1966 and the spring of 1982 (beginning with Volume 6 and running through Volume 21) just twelve percent of the essays in the journal were focused primarily on a theoretical concern. That number jumped to twenty percent between the fall of 1982 and the fall of 1999. Some of these essays addressed more-or-less traditional issues—the idea of film authorship, the question of film realism—but much of this work reflected the growing centrality to film studies of Grand Theory (to again appropriate Bordwell's terminology). An interest in, and engagement with, permutations of feminist film theory—much of that deploying various aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis—was the most constant strain here, with nearly all the theoretical essays referencing gender in some fashion or another, even if, as is the case with one essay, the aim was to object to feminist readings of films.[22] The interpretive analyses were themselves generally highly theorized, with a great deal of emphasis being placed on processes of ideological unmasking—which is to say only that most of the readings of films being published at this time were symptomatic readings. Toward the end of the 1990s, brief nods were made in the direction of queer and subaltern studies.

The evident appeal of theory notwithstanding, the mainstay subject of *Cinema Journal* throughout the 80s and 90s remained historical analysis. Traditional historical studies—of Thomas Ince's importance to film history, of the early years of the American Vitagraph Company, of the effects of the Red Scare on the production and distribution of films—still dominated, comprising thirty-five percent of all the work published in the journal during this period.[23] But new historicist, cultural materialist, and cultural studies approaches to film became progressively common and the main interest of much of this work had to do with history—the cultural functioning of a trope of some sort that was itself historically specific, for example, or the marking of a shift in cultural understanding of a given phenomenon.[24] Taken together, the categories of history and cultural studies (the umbrella term I use for the various kinds of aligned work listed above) accounted for forty-seven percent of the writing in the

journal at this time. So what the category of history lost in moving from the 60s and 70s to the 80s and 90s, the study of film history recouped in the form of new kinds of historical analysis. The journal's role as principal organ of the Society for Cinema Studies—its role, that is, as trade journal—got highlighted by the inclusion in the 90s of special sections on Resources for Teaching Film and Video Courses (Volume 34, Number 3, 1995), Film Pedagogy (Volume 36, Number 2, 1997), and Techniques and Approaches for Teaching Film and Video Courses (Volume 38, Number 4, 1999).

In addition to these special sections on pedagogy, *Cinema Journal* intermittently published, throughout the 90s, a special section entitled Dialogue, which included comments on work published previously in the journal and responses to these comments by the original authors and sometimes others. After the turn of the century, this Dialogue format was dropped and, in 2004, replaced by the regular publication of a section entitled In Focus, where scholars would weigh in on a given topic of interest to those in the field. The effect of including these special sections was a steady, and finally quite substantial, increase in the sheer amount of material being published per issue.[25] The pieces in the Dialogue section were, in terms of type, quite varied, the Dialogue section mirroring the journal as a whole in that regard. Typologically, the In Focus feature was much less various: over the course of the period I track, essays that fit into almost every category I use did make appearances. But the In Focus section was dominated by polemic, pedagogy, and, especially, history (often in the form of reportage). Accounting for this material poses problems. Leaving it out of account altogether seems untenable: the In Focus feature was too substantive a part of the journal just to ignore; more importantly, it helps identify central concerns of the discipline. Yet giving all this material the same weight as the stand-alone articles seems illegitimate. So I have opted, Solomon-like, to split the baby in half, counting each of the contributions to In Focus as half an article. This solution to the problem is not ideal, but the numbers, so adjusted, do I think give a fair indication of the interests of *Cinema Journal* and of the kinds of work published there during the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century.

The main interest was, again, history, which was nearly as dominant a concern as it had been in the 60s. The centrality of the subject was marked not just by the numbers, with almost half of the work published from 2000 to 2015 being aimed at providing historical understanding, but by the increasing self-consciousness of the journal's renewed investment

in—its explicit foregrounding of—such understanding.[26] One of the first In Focus features (Volume 43, Number 3, 2004), for example, took up the issue of the current state of film studies and of *Cinema Journal*'s place within the field: nearly all the essays concerned themselves with questions of historical positioning. Less than a year later, the feature directly addressed the "Historical Turn" in film studies (Volume 44, Number 1, 2004). Yet another In Focus (Volume 46, Number 3, 2007) considered how the digital revolution was changing the nature of our access to the past. Still another (Volume 50, Number 1, 2010) discussed non-Western forms of historiography. Adding the essays I have slotted as cultural studies, whose focus is generally some historically determinate cultural formation, to the essays I have categorized as history proper produces a collection that accounts for more than two thirds of all the work published in the journal between 2000 and 2015.

The next most remarkable aspect of the work appearing in the journal during this period was the precipitous decline in the number of essays devoted to theory. Between 1982 and 1999, such work accounted for twenty percent of the total. Between 2000 and 2015, that number dropped to just five percent. I can only speculate about the possible causes. My sense is that, since psychoanalysis in whatever form tends toward the ahistorical, the "Historical Turn" in literature and film studies took a bit of the wind out of the sails of the psychoanalytic approach to either subject. It is certainly the case that there was no longer a felt need to foreground theory, to put it at the center of the project: when theory was appealed to, after the turn of the century, it was most commonly just folded into some other type of work, typically an interpretive or historical analysis.

The first fifteen years of the twentieth century saw, in the pages of *Cinema Journal*, growing interest in queer studies, increasing attention paid to non-Western film and media cultures, the advent of industry studies and the large-scale expansion of television studies. That last is especially significant: not only did the journal devote five In Focus features to discussion of television and television studies; its sponsoring institution changed its name once again (in 2002) to reflect the expansion of its frame of reference, now calling itself the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. Some of the work in the subfields mentioned above was, of course, interpretive. But altogether between 2000 and 2015 just seventeen percent of the material published in *Cinema Journal* paid significant attention to interpretation.[27]

Adding totals for all the years this survey covers indicates that the presiding focus of *Cinema Journal*'s attention from its inception to nearly the present was cinema history, with historical analyses accounting for around forty-five percent of all the work published. Various forms of cultural studies—whose principal interest is, again, history—accounted for another thirteen percent of the total. Interpretive analyses made up just nineteen percent of the work that appeared in the journal during this long stretch of its existence.

Screen

If, in 1969 or 1970, one had put down one's copy of *Cinema Journal* and picked up a copy of *Screen*, one would have been more struck by the similarities than the differences. The transition would not have been at all jarring. Both would have had the same feel, if I can put it that way—the writing straddling a border between the journalistic and the academic. Because of *Screen*'s ties to the BFI's Education Department, the journal was much more invested in discussing pedagogy than *Cinema Journal* was at that time.[28] And it was a bit more engaged with film theory—but the principal theoretical issue for both journals was the same: the status of auteurist approaches to film. In *Screen*, that issue was taken up more systematically and directly and it generated more controversy. But there were as many essays arguing in support as there were arguing against.[29] As was the case with *Cinema Journal*, film history was the presiding concern, accounting for more than thirty-five percent of the work published in those two years. As was the case with *Cinema Journal*, the interpretation of individual films was of relatively minor interest, with just thirteen percent of the essays devoted to analyzing movies (although *Screen* did publish a number of short reviews of films during this time).

By 1971, however, what would have been most striking about a comparison of contemporary issues of *Screen* and *Cinema Journal* would have been the differences. In 1969 and 1970, there had been a steady undercurrent of desire expressed to see a substantive change in the nature of film studies—mostly in the form of calls for more methodological rigor, less impressionism, more attention to individual films.[30] As is well known, a new editorial board was installed at *Screen* in 1971, with Sam Rohdie at its head, and more-or-less overnight the whole landscape of the journal got transformed, as an editorial announcement introducing the first issue of Volume 12 makes clear at the outset: "With this issue there are significant

changes in *Screen*—a new editorial board, a new format and a different kind of content."[31] The journal went from publishing bi-monthly to publishing quarterly, a move designed to signal and to accommodate the shift from a more journalistic to a more academic presentation. The articles got longer, more directly polemical, and explicitly oriented toward film theory. To borrow a bit of a thought from Virginia Woolf: on or about April, 1971, the nature of English-language film studies changed.

Just to instantiate: beyond the editorials announcing the changes in policy, the first issue of 1971 was comprised of the following: a Marxist inflected call for a turn away from auteurism toward a more socially conscious film criticism; an argument for sociological studies of cinema and for the development of a sociology of cinema; a translation of an article from *Cahiers du Cinéma* announcing its new, theoretically informed, politically engaged, explicitly Marxist/Leninist editorial policy; a survey of the state of film journals in Britain and France, with a call for a more *Cahiers*-like polemical, and more serious, film criticism; a review essay on the now-published proceedings of an important conference on structuralism that had taken place at Johns Hopkins that had included, among others, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida; and an outline for a critical methodology for studying television.[32] What brave new worlds, indeed.

It will be news to no one, I imagine, that the most striking features of this issue—the polemical tone, the emphasis on theory, the commitment to serving as a channel for English-language translation of work done elsewhere (chiefly France)—continued to characterize *Screen* throughout the 70s. During the course of that decade, *Screen* documented and contributed to political crises within the BFI (and the culture of British film studies generally)[33]; represented (in translation) vituperative ideological debates between the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique*[34]; published translations of the work of early Soviet film theoreticians that served as historical model for the kind of negotiation between culture and politics the writers at *Screen* were trying to effect and for the political/cultural insurrection they were attempting to stage[35]; launched attacks against the kind of work being done by critics associated with the journal *Movie* (and against that journal itself)[36]; introduced, argued for, and modified both structuralist semiotics and Lacanian/Althusserian ideology critique (publishing, along the way, a significant amount of work by and about Christian Metz).

The conceptual underpinnings of *Screen*'s project in the 70s—the journal's preoccupations, its philosophical and political commitments—are in

general terms well known and have been effectively outlined by Philip Rosen in his contribution to *Inventing Film Studies*.[37] For my purposes, what bears noting is that the common association of 70s *Screen* with theory is borne out by surveying the kinds of work published in the journal at this time. By my accounting, around forty-two percent of the essays appearing in *Screen* between the spring of 1971 (Volume 12, Number 1) and the summer of 1979 (Volume 20, Number 2) focused primarily if not exclusively on theoretical analysis. And despite the fact that I count as interpretation a lot of work whose chief (one wants to say "real") concern is elaborating or exemplifying a theoretical position or approach—Stephen Heath's essays on *Touch of Evil*, for example, or his analysis of Nagisa Ôshima's *Death by Hanging* (Kôshikei, 1968), half of which is devoted to a summary explanation of the Lacanian "real"—interpretation accounted for just nine percent of the total volume of essays published during this period.[38] Although film history was not as central to *Screen*—at least, not in the 70s—as it was to *Cinema Journal*, nearly a third of the essays appearing in the journal in the 70s were devoted to historical analysis.

At the end of 1979, as result of long-standing tensions within British film studies culture generally, and within, more particularly, both the BFI and the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT), and finally within and between the two journals sponsored by SEFT, *Screen* and *Screen Education*, *Screen* abruptly turned away from a focus on theory and toward a foregrounding of media and cultural studies.[39] For the next two years, the journal's tone and texture remained consistent with its immediate past—in that the essays were often abstract and demanding, academic in feel. But theory *qua* theory was no longer *Screen*'s main concern. There were essays on radio, photography, fine arts, and pornography. But the gravitational center at this point was surely television, as the publication of a special issue on TV at the end of 1981 made clear. Altogether, essays that I identified as reflecting some aspect of cultural studies accounted for around forty-two percent of the work published in *Screen* between the winter of 1979 (Volume 20, Numbers 3/4) and the end of 1981 (Volume 22, Number 4). History, an ongoing concern, accounted for another forty percent. Interpreting movies was of even less interest in this period than it had been previously, with just a handful of articles (just seven percent of the total) engaged in that work.

The tensions that had reshaped the journal in 1979 did so again in 1982, when *Screen*—mostly as a means of distancing itself from the academy—returned to the format it had prior to its turn to theory in 1971.

Once again publishing bi-monthly, *Screen* adopted a more journalistic tone and feel: the essays were typically shorter and more accessible than they had previously been; the material was much more heterogeneous, including discussions of film posters, pin-ups, graffiti, newspaper features, and popular music. Several issues contained photo essays. Because *Screen* and *Screen Education* merged—the former, being more prestigious and better known, effectively subsuming the latter—the new *Screen* contained much more work on pedagogy than it had before. The review returned as a common feature of the journal. The emphasis on television that began in 1979 became even more pronounced, with three separate issues being devoted, between 1982 and 1984, to different aspects of television studies. Although the percentage of work focused on historical analysis dropped to just over a third of the total, history was, during this two-year period, the largest category. Cultural studies, at twenty-two percent, was second. Interpretation, if I can be allowed the formulation, tied with theory for third, each category accounting for ten percent of the total.

As one might have suspected, theory was more important to *Screen* during the 70s and early 80s than it ever was to *Cinema Journal*. Over the course of the latter's existence (to 2015, the end-point of my study), theory was the central concern of just eleven percent of the work published. In the former, by contrast, a quarter of all the essays published between 1969 and 1984 had a theoretical focus. And yet, as was the case with *Cinema Journal*, *Screen*'s principal interest was history, with a third of the work appearing in the journal through the period offering some form of historical understanding. Interpretation was of significantly less concern, with only ten percent of the essays being devoted to that kind of work.

Wide Angle

A host of English-language film studies journals were launched during the course of the 70s: *Camera Obscura*, *Film History*, and *The Velvet Light Trap* all began in 1971. *Literature/Film Quarterly*, which its website advertises as "the longest standing international journal devoted to the study of adaptation,"[40] was founded in 1973. *Jump Cut* began in 1974 and *Film Criticism* in 1975. *Wide Angle* emerged in the midst of this boom, its first issue appearing in the spring of 1976. Like a number of the other journals that had their advent at this time, *Camera Obscura* and *Jump Cut* especially, *Wide Angle* was conceived as recognizing the centrality to film studies of the kinds of theoretical concerns that *Screen* had been

foregrounding—a point made explicit in its subtitle: "A Quarterly Journal of Theory, Criticism and Practice." But while *Wide Angle*, like *Screen*, did include essays focused primarily on theory—essays, that is, aimed at propounding, in the abstract, a particular theoretical point—its commitment to theory is even more evident in the assumption made in the bulk of the work published of the need for theoretical positioning. In other words, by the time *Wide Angle* began its twenty-year run, the culture of film studies had shifted enough that there was no longer a felt need, as there had been in the late 60s and early 70s, to champion the integration of theory into film studies or to defend the value of theory. That value was simply understood: theoretical grounding had become an expectation, regardless of the kind of work being done. Virtually all of the essays I characterize as interpretation, for example, if they are not auteurist oriented efforts at locating a given director's world view, characterizing sensibility, or thematic and stylistic signature (about which, more momentarily) are grounded in or appeal to established theoretical positions and simply assume, on the reader's part, familiarity with contemporary theory.

To take just one example: all of the interpretive essays in Volume 4, Number 2 (1980), an issue focused on film melodrama, frame the discussion as examination of ideological processes, seeing the various films under consideration as reinforcing, or critiquing, or bearing a conflicted relation to aspects of bourgeois ideology. For instance, the opening sentence of Enrique Fernández's essay on "The Rhetorical Strategies of *Memories of Underdevelopment*"—"Any discussion of film and ideology must deal sooner or later with the complex issue of cinematic point of view"—serves to signal, at the outset, in an offhand way, his expectation that he and his reader share an inherited Frankfort-school sensibility.[41] (The sentence also works to indicate, of course, that the ensuing analysis of Alea's film aims at bigger game than the film itself.) But again, all the interpretive essays in this issue explicitly reference ideology. In a discussion of the World War II-era melodrama *Guest in the House* (1944), Sandy Flitterman observes, for example, that "It is the work of bourgeois ideology to reinforce the split between the workplace (the space of production) and the home (the space of reproduction, both physical and ideological)"; and she goes on to identify a characteristic that is "[t]ypical of reified social relations under capitalism."[42] Christopher Orr refers, similarly, to the "ideological project" of *Written on the Wind* (1956).[43] Frank Krutnik discusses the means, in film, "through which ideological processes are anchored and naturalized."[44] And Bryan Crow, in his contribution to the issue, seeks to examine melodrama's "ideological underpinnings" by looking at the Greta Garbo film *A Woman of Affairs* (1928).[45]

But beyond this kind of general positioning within a theoretical framework, all of the essays refer—again, mostly in casual, offhand ways—to various theoretical constructs. Most gesture at structuralist semiotics: Flitterman mentions the "code of narrative actions" (18); Krutnik cites Christian Metz and Stephen Heath; Crow cites Jean Mitry; Fernández focuses his conclusion around discussion of a filmic "syntagm" (55). Although none of the essays could be said to pursue a psychoanalytic reading of a film (Krutnik's discussion of Josef von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture* [1941] comes closest), the issue is peppered with references to Lacan and Freud: Crow alludes to the Freudian psychological processes of condensation, displacement, figuration, and sublimation (48–49); Krutnik makes mention of the Lacanian orders of the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic" (40) and refers to "the primary process of the [film] text" (39); and Orr refers to "The Law of the Father" and "castration anxiety" (31). Both Orr and Flitterman invoke gaze theory.

Two other features of *Wide Angle*, beyond the easy assimilation of theory, distinguish it from the journals previously discussed. First, issues that I characterize as rhetorical—a category that, for my purposes, includes classical aesthetics, narratology, small-scale theorizing, cognitivist analyses of the processing of film elements, and so on—were much more central to *Wide Angle* than they were to either *Screen* or *Cinema Journal*. In the case of each of the latter, essays focused on rhetoric account for only about five percent of the work published. That figure more than doubles in the case of *Wide Angle*. Thus, despite the cutting edge tone of the publication, it expressed an ongoing interest in issues associated with what one thinks of as conventional aesthetics, issues related to long-standing concerns in, for example, literary studies and art history: forms of narrative patterning (Volume 1, Number 2, 1976); the uses and effects of counterpointing (Volume 2, Number 2, 1978); narrative coherence (Volume 3, Number 2, 1979); the question of realism (Volume 7, Number 4, 1985; Volume 8, Number 3, 1986); the uses of free indirect discourse (Volume 8, Number 3, 1986); relations between style and history (Volume 11, Number 3, 1989); and so on. This concern for aesthetics is also reflected in the interpretive work published, which, when it is not organized around a theoretical construct of some sort, aims at identifying the "feel" of a given body of work. An article in the journal's first issue, for example, presents itself as offering an analysis of Blake Edwards's *Gunn* (1967) "within the context," as the essay subtitle has it, "of his genre films"; but really the aim of the essay is to identify a kind of world view, a particular sensibility, that

runs through all of Edwards's films—a sense of the world as chaotic, unpredictable, and threatening.[46] An essay in the last issue of Volume 1, "The Ritual Cinema of Yukio Mishima," has the weighting of elements reversed (the title suggesting a consideration of the aims of, not a film, but an oeuvre, but the essay devoting most of its attention to just one movie), but the basic impulse is the same.[47] In the following issue, James Leach offers commentary on Roman Polanski's "cinema of cruelty," the essay's title again indicating the desire to distill the essence of a particular director's body of work.[48]

Second, although all the journals under consideration here reflect trends in the discipline (as the previous descriptions above should suggest), *Wide Angle* seems more sensitive, more directly engaged with, these trends than any of the other journals surveyed. Like *Screen* and *Cinema Journal* in the mid 60s, *Wide Angle* in its first volumes had the look and feel of a general interest magazine rather than a strictly academic journal. Or rather, like the other two journals a decade earlier, *Wide Angle* was, at its outset, straddling this divide. On the one hand, the articles were all fairly short by contemporary academic standards, and many of the pieces included—interviews with special effects artists, for example, or translated reprints of articles from *Paris Match* or *Esprit*[49]—would have been perfectly at home in something like *Film Comment* or *Sight and Sound*. On the other hand, the focus of the essays—their engagement with philosophy, theory, film rhetoric, and ideology—marked the journal from the first issue as, in a general sense, "scholarly."

Over the course of the latter half of the 70s, the tone of the journal became increasingly academic. And the material published increasingly reflected the growing commitment, within academic film studies, to forms of politically engaged criticism. The point is perhaps most directly reflected in the decision, in 1979, to devote an issue of the journal to "Political Cinema," an issue that included an essay on the political implications of the form of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), an analysis of a sequence of shots from *Man with a Movie Camera* (Chelovek s kino-apparatom, 1929) designed to show that the film functions to reveal class conflict and that it must be read in light of that project, a discussion of the politics of *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse, 1933), and a psychoanalytic, feminist reading of what Deborah Linderman, in the essay, calls "the heterogeneous text," which reveals the position of the feminine in patriarchy—repressed on the one hand, threatening on the other—by means of the nonintegrated elements it contains.[50] But this sort

of leaning into the politics of representation characterized much of the work published in the journal in the late 70s and early 80s. The 1978 issue on "Independent Filmmakers" (Volume 2, Number 3), for example, devoted much of its attention to forms of politicized film projects—feminist films, for example, or the structural/materialist film movement. The issue on "Sexual Difference: Psychoanalysis and Film" (Volume 5, Number 1, 1982) was, as that title suggests, mainly concerned with psychoanalytically inflected feminist interventions of various sorts—revisions of accounts of sexual difference and of the processes of identification, outlines of modes of dealing with the threat of sexual difference in movies from the World War II period, feminist readings of individual films. Three of the five critical essays comprising the issue on "Authorship" (Volume 6, Number 1, 1984), although very different in terms of the general aims, with one focused on history, one on theory, and one on interpretation, presented themselves as forms of ideology critique.[51] And the vast majority of the interpretive work appearing in the journal between 1980 and 1984 was political in nature.

In the mid-80s, the articles in *Wide Angle* started to skew longer, becoming even more typically academic. History, always a preoccupation, became even more central—a shift most directly indicated by the journal's having published four issues on the subject in fairly rapid succession: one (drawn from the Proceedings of the 6th International Film Theory Conference organized by the Center for 20th Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in November 1982) on "Cinema Histories/Cinema Practices," (Volume 7, Numbers 1–2, 1985), one on "Film and Social History" (Volume 8, Number 6, 1986), one on "Film Studies/Film Histories" (Volume 9, Number 3, 1987), and one entitled "The Studio System: Case Histories" (Volume 10, Number 1, 1988). That last also pretty decisively marked the moment when *Wide Angle* turned hard into the academic skid toward cultural studies (and aligned approaches). Between 1988 and 1999 (when the journal ceased publication) history and cultural studies were, by far, *Wide Angle*'s chief concerns. During that period, these two categories account for seventy percent of the work published in the journal.

I do not know which was the cause and which the effect—whether it was the focus on cultural studies that led to the gradual change in the overall tone of the journal, or whether editorial considerations concerning format and purview led to an inclusion of more work in the cultural studies vein—but starting somewhere around 1993 (the origin being difficult

to pin-point), *Wide Angle* started to look and feel less like an academic film studies journal than like a general interest magazine focused on art and culture. The shift in sensibility and editorial aims is to some extent signaled by the issue on "Film and the Other Arts" (Volume 15, Number 3, 1993), a collection of work drawn from the 1992 Ohio Film Conference. But it is also palpable in the increasing reliance on personal reflection as a staple form: for example, the subsequent issue, entitled "Landscape and Place," contains only one conventional analytical essay. That article aside, the issue was comprised of a description of the aims of National Geographic in presenting images of places around the world; a series of assignments from a course on "Film/Video and Space" that had been taught at MIT; a summary of a series of creative projects by media artist Michael Naimark; and personal ruminations on a number of varied topics—the lack of attention paid to place in films, the need for artistry and imagination in the production of virtual realities, the social meaning of place, particularly as related to issues of identity, the value of place for tourism and film, the experience of traveling by car.[52] Volume 18, Number 1 (1996), somewhat abashedly titled "What the Cat Dragged In," consisted of an interview with media artist Shu Lea Cheang, a series of feminist rewritings of poems by W. B. Yeats, an introduction to microphone technology, and an essay on memory, subjectivity, and Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* (Zerkalo, 1975).[53] One has the feeling that the journal was losing its sense of its subject. And, needless to say, there was very little interpretive work on offer throughout this period: from 1990 to 1999, less than six percent of the work published in *Wide Angle* was focused on the interpretation of films.

It is worth noting, finally, that the overall profile of *Wide Angle* is similar to the overall profiles of the other two journals previously discussed. From its inception to its demise, *Wide Angle*'s presiding interest was history, with roughly forty percent of the essays appearing in the journal over the course of its run being focused on historical analysis. Another eighteen percent would sort into the allied field of cultural studies. The marked turning away from interpretation during the last ten years of the journal's existence notwithstanding, *Wide Angle* was measurably more committed to interpretation than either *Screen* or *Cinema Journal*. And yet, from 1976 to 1999, the whole of *Wide Angle*'s existence, just fifteen percent of the work it published focused on the reading of films.

Movie

The journal *Movie*, which began publishing in 1962, and which continued to appear sporadically in print form until 2000,[54] is sufficiently associated in the public imagination with the interpretation (and evaluation) of individual films that there is no need for me to belabor the point. Moreover, unlike any of the other three journals discussed, *Movie* remained remarkably consistent in terms of the personnel it employed, the writers whose work it published, and the editorial policy it pursued. Of the four journals under consideration, *Movie* was least affected by trends in the discipline, although it did make a practice of responding to those trends. Thus, when the journal resumed publication after a three-year hiatus in the mid-70s, one feels, in the transcription of a panel discussion entitled "The Return of *Movie*," the pressure being brought to bear by the advent of theory: the panelists (Ian Cameron, V. F. Perkins, Michael Walker, Jim Hillier, and Robin Wood) acknowledged the limits of *Movie*'s so-far singular attention to individual films and directors, addressed the question of the value of semiological analyses of films; and the issue itself included essays on topics that were felt to have been too little attended to—television, for example, and film genre.[55] A few years later, *Movie* included a very long, substantive, and compelling critique, by Andrew Britton, of the French-influenced theory being advanced by *Screen*.[56]

Given how different *Movie* and *Screen* came to seem over the course of the late 60s and early 70s, and given how at odds the journals were in terms of their approaches to film studies, both effectively emerged in conversation with French film culture, both having been heavily influenced at different points and different ways by *Cahiers du Cinéma*. I have already discussed *Screen*'s indebtedness to and engagement with the French. In *Movie*, that indebtedness can be seen early on, not just in the focus on American popular cinema, and not just in the auteurist orientation of the journal, but in the selection of directors singled out for consideration and celebration, the pantheon of artists at both journals being—especially in the first years of *Movie*'s existence—eerily similar: Vincent Minnelli, Nicholas Ray, Otto Preminger, Arthur Penn, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock. But whereas the writers at *Screen* quickly began worrying the idea of director as author, those at *Movie* made it the center pole of their enterprise, a point Ian Cameron, who edited the journal for the whole of its run in print form, made explicit in its second number: "The assumption which underlies all of the writing in *Movie* is that the director is the author

of the film, the person who gives it any distinctive quality it may have."[57] *Movie* never really wavered from this commitment to director-centered discussion and analysis.

But as the last phrase of the quote above suggests, what the writers at *Movie* were finally aiming at (and on occasion arguing for) was an effective—that is, persuasive (V. F. Perkins, in *Film as Film* would refer to it as "rational")—evaluative criticism.[58] The emphasis on evaluation was evident from the outset. The first issue, for example, included a pyramid-shaped chart ranking British and American filmmakers by level of talent: "Great"; "Brilliant"; "Very Talented"; "Talented"; "Competent or Ambitious"; "The Rest." But the emphasis carried through right to the end of the journal's print run, as the title of an essay from one of *Movie*'s last print numbers—"In Defence of *Fatal Attraction*"—makes clear.[59] But precisely because the writers for *Movie*—like the pre-1968 writers for *Cahiers du Cinéma*—were so invested in evaluation, the work they produced was as often concerned with rhetoric (the functioning and effectiveness of the narrative), or with the sensibility, signature style, and worldview of a given director, as it was with meaning.

The somewhat mixed nature of *Movie*'s attentiveness to individual films can perhaps be best illustrated by looking at particulars—a few representative issues selected more or less at random. Number 4 (November 1962) included eleven essays that can be classified neither as history nor theory and that are focused on individual movies. But nearly half of these present themselves not as interpretations but as reviews of the films under consideration. While Mark Shivas's one-page discussion of Fritz Lang's *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (Die 1000 Augen des Dr. Mabuse, 1960) does, in an off-hand way, touch on the film's thematic concerns (the ease with which, on Shivas's account, evil machinations can be defeated by "the Love of a Good Woman for a Good Man" [6]), his main interest is its rhetoric, the elegance and force of the editing.[60] The following essay, unsigned, extolls the virtues of a French director, Michel Deville, at that point little known in England, by means of brief consideration of two then-recent films, *Tonight or Never* (Ce Soir ou jamais, 1961) and *Adorable Liar* (Adorable Menteuse, 1962). Shivas contributes another one-page review—really, a kind of *explication de texte*—to an article entitled "Two Views of Jean Renoir's *Le Caporal Epinglé*."[61] By contrast, the companion piece by Cameron (though also just a page long) offers a directed reading of the film: "by exploring the reactions of the men to captivity, Renoir has made his film a definition of freedom."[62] Robin Wood's discussion of Otto

Preminger's *Advise and Consent* (1962) reads a lot like Shivas's discussion of the Renoir movie—presenting itself, that is, not so much as an interpretation, but as an analytical description of it; but the essay is significantly longer and more detailed than Shivas's. And since the weight throughout is placed on the movie's moral judgment of the characters, the essay feels more interpretive.[63] The two essays contributed by Mayersberg—an examination of Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954) and *Porgy and Bess* (1959) and a review of Roger Leenhardt's *Le Rendez-vous de minuit* (1962)—aim mainly at interpretation. Mayersberg describes the Leenhardt movie, for example, as "a piece of filmed criticism, a fictionalized essay on the cinema."[64] And his discussion of Preminger begins by identifying the "common subject" of both *Carmen Jones* and *Porgy and Bess*: "freedom."[65] The central concern of Shivas's essay on *The Password is Courage* (1962) is appraisal, a determination of value ("At last. A British war film that is both exciting and funny," he proclaims at the outset).[66] That is true as well of Perkins's essay on *Giant* (1956).[67] Cameron's "The Limits of Suspense," a review of Blake Edwards's *Experiment in Terror* (1962), seeks to identify the emotional effects of the film, the way it produces fear.[68]

Although *Movie*, unlike *Cinema Journal* and *Screen*, never quite came to have the look and feel of an academic enterprise, it did get, if I can put it this way, more serious as it went along. Thus, by 1968, the articles had gotten longer and more substantive. But the tone and the approach remained the same. Number 15 (Spring 1968) was comprised of an interview by Peter Bogdanovich of Don Siegel, a Don Siegel filmography, an article concerning pending legislation having to do with film distribution, a description, by Stig Bjorkman, of his making of *I Love, You Love* (Jag Älskar, Du Älskar, 1968), a section on film culture, with reports from Hollywood, Barcelona, Stockholm, Rome, and London—and five essays dealing with individual movies. The first of these, a discussion of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) by Robin Wood—like most of Wood's work and like much of the work that appeared in *Movie* during its print run generally—freely mixes interpretation and evaluation. Near the outset of the essay, for example, Wood proclaims, with classical Wood bravado, that "Anyone who has seen *Persona* will understand at once when, in the context of the above remarks [about the possibilities of artistic expression at a historical moment marked by pervasive awareness of needless suffering and the potential meaninglessness of human existence], I salute it as one of the most courageous films ever made."[69] But the bulk of the weight, this kind of proclamation notwithstanding, falls on interpretation, as the

following line suggests: "The film is not so much about an exchange of identities on the personal level as about a merging of two representative consciousnesses; or the process whereby the protective facades people erect to defend themselves from reality are broken down" (24). The evaluative orientation of the second piece (putatively) focused on a single movie is made clear by the opening line: "At last John Huston has made a film which is good—all the way through."[70] The author's central concern here, however, is not to analyze Huston's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), but to locate "the essence of Huston as a filmmaker" (26). Of the two essays on Luis Buñuel that follow, one (by Raymond Durgnat) is interpretive, weighing four alternative readings of a key moment in *Belle de Jour* (1967)[71]; the other (by Robin Wood) aims at evaluating Buñuel as an artist: "At first, one is tempted to associate Buñuel with Blake and Lawrence: the sense of all-pervading corruption rotting the fabric of society recalls Blake's 'Experience' or the England of *Women in Love*, and there is apparently the same appeal to spontaneous-instinctive life as the criterion by which the corruption is judged. But one soon comes to realize the utter lack, in Buñuel films, of the qualities that make Blake and Lawrence great artists."[72] Again, interpretation and evaluation bleed together here, but, again, the bulk of the weight is on the latter. Sandwiched between the preceding essays and the final substantive examination of a movie is a very brief, unsigned review of Peter Bogdanovich's *Targets* (1968), accompanied by an array of still shots drawn from that movie. The final article on a single film, Richard Winkler's analysis of what he sees as the dialectical structure of *Far from Vietnam* (1967) is pretty relentlessly interpretive.[73]

One last instance: Number 21 (Autumn 1975), the second issue published after a three-year hiatus, contained a couple of essays on television (presumably designed to meet the felt sense of a kind of narrowness in *Movie*'s approach to the field); but mostly the issue is made up of a long assessment by Robin Wood of the work of Robert Altman and by the first installment of a new section of the journal devoted to a consideration of "American Cinema in the '70s." Wood's essay is fairly representative of a certain strain of his work in the 60s and early 70s, reflecting an impatience—sometimes a kind of disgust—with films and directors that seem to him to take a purely negative approach to their subjects, that aren't in his view oriented toward the production of value. The title of the essay, "Smart-Ass & Cutie Pie," refers to a smugness Wood sees in Altman that Wood finds distasteful. Again, the essay is long, especially by *Movie* standards, and it makes passing reference to details in a number of films. But

the emphasis, throughout, is on evaluation, not interpretation.[74] The essays on American cinema in the 70s are, as the saying goes, a mixed bag (in terms of their basic aims). Jim Hillier's article on a film that critics mostly dismissed but that he found interesting and wanted to recover, a movie by Noel Black called *Jennifer on My Mind* (1971), frames itself as review, beginning and ending with evaluative gestures. But really what Hillier wants to do is argue for a particular understanding of the movie—seeing it as "both a black comedy *and* … [as being] *about* [the formal] conventions [it is employing] and their relation to subject matter."[75] Douglas Pye's essay on Sam Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner* (1972) aims at being both an analysis of the film and of Peckinpah as auteur.[76] Tom Ryan's discussion of *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1970) mixes interpretation and evaluation, but its focus is the latter: "With an admirable precision and economy," begins one paragraph, "Mulligan has placed the film's central figures." "The film's structure," begins the next, "again underlines Mulligan's acute sense of place."[77] An essay on *The Towering Inferno* (1974), by Richard Dyer, divides its attention about equally between meaning and effect.[78] And the concluding essay in the section, an examination of *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), is at once an analysis and evaluation of the film and a commentary on Hellman as director.[79]

This point about the heterogeneous nature of the kinds of analyses being practiced in the pages of *Movie* seems to me worth stressing because, while the link that exists in the popular imagination between *Movie* and detailed textual analysis is surely justified, the issue—even in this case—is complicated. Even here, that is, in the case of a journal devoted to the discussion of individual films, interpretation—in the sense that I mean the term—is less common than one might expect. In fact, the critics at *Movie* were effectively practicing two different kinds of "close reading"—one oriented toward viewer affect and narrative effectiveness (aimed either at explication or, more commonly, evaluation) and one that grounded attention to textual detail in an overarching concern for thematics. This sort of blurring of boundaries (between interpretation and review, on the one hand, and interpretation and rhetorical analysis, on the other), a blurring that carries over into *Movie*'s legacy in film studies (in the work of scholars influenced by the *Movie* critics), matters to my argument because it contributes, I believe, to the general misperception that interpretation is more central to film studies than, in fact, it really is.

Having mildly troubled the common association made between *Movie* and interpretation, I do now, however, want to affirm that association. For

Movie was vastly more invested in interpreting individual films than any other journal whose contents I surveyed. Interpretation, for example, was the largest single category of work in *Movie*. That is not true for any of the other journals, where, again, history predominated. Indeed, interpretation was more than twice as prominent in *Movie* (where it accounted for approximately thirty-six percent of the total volume of the work published) than it was, on average, for the other three. And as I noted previously, *Movie* devoted more space to film reviews, which made up another eighteen percent of the work on offer (compare that to four percent in *Screen*, two percent in *Wide Angle*, and a barely measurable one-one-hundredths of a percent in *Cinema Journal*).[80] Thus, more than half of all the essays that appeared in *Movie* focused on individual films. That emphasis, I want to insist, is unusual—indeed, highly idiosyncratic.[81] While I can't, of course, prove the point, I would be willing to bet that if one were to survey the contents of *all* English language film studies journals one would find that the general profile of the kinds of work published would, in the vast majority of cases, resemble those of *Screen*, *Cinema Journal*, and *Wide Angle* more than it would resemble that of *Movie*. In other words, despite the prominence of some of the *Movie* critics (how impoverished the field would be without the contributions of Perkins, Wood, and Cameron), both the journal itself and the kind of work with which it is associated have to be seen as, well, not exactly marginal, but not exactly central either—a small but important tributary in a much larger stream.

* * *

By way of brief conclusion, let me be clear: it has not been my aim here to suggest that interpretation has never played a meaningful role in film studies. The evidence of my own surveys would belie such a claim. Nor have I wished to argue that the other categories of work I have discussed in these surveys have been over-emphasized. As the surveys indicate, the single most important category of work in the field is, and has always been, history (although what has been meant by history has changed at points over the years). This is, it seems to me, as it should be. Nothing meaningful can be accomplished in the discipline in the absence of historical understanding. It is nearly as important that film scholars continue to raise and attempt to answer theoretical questions—about the nature of the medium, about its relations to individual viewers and to culture and cultures. Here and throughout the book, I have been trying to make just the following

basic points: that film studies is not now, and has never been, awash in interpretations of individual movies; that interpretation as a practice has not, in other words, been done to death; that what has been felt to be a glut is really a kind of dearth; and that since, as I argue in the following chapter, such work has value, there would be a value in more of it getting done. Film studies is not, after all, a zero-sum game. Eliminating the low-level stigma that has become attached to "doing a reading" of a movie will cost the discipline nothing. It might, by contrast, allow for, even invite, the gradual development of a significantly richer, more nuanced understanding of the individual works that comprise the cinema—the fascinating object, that is, of our collective interest.

Notes

1. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, "The Academy and Motion Pictures," *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), p. xi, hereafter cited in text.
2. See Mark Lynn Anderson, "Taking Liberties: The Payne Fund Studies and the Creation of the Media Expert," pp. 38–65; and Dana Polan, "Young Art, Old Colleges: Early Episodes in the American Study of Film," pp. 93–117: all in Grieveson and Wasson.
3. See Grieveson and Wasson, p. xi.
4. See Lewis Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film," *Cinema Journal* 7 (1967–68), 1–21; Russell Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theaters: Building an Audience for the Movies," *Wide Angle* 1.1 (1976), 4–9.
5. Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," *Screen* 16.2 (1975), 14–76. The response is Ben Singer, "Film, Photography, and Fetish: The Analyses of Christian Metz," *Cinema Journal* 27.4 (1988), 4–22. Singer takes exception to Metz's conception of film as fetish.
6. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975), 6.
7. D. N. Rodowick, "The Difficulty of Difference," *Wide Angle* 5.1 (1982), 4–15.
8. In the actual accounting I do to produce percentages, I count such an essay as one half theory and one half interpretation.
9. See Raymond Bellour, "The Obvious and the Code," *Screen* 15.4 (1974), 7–17.
10. See Stephen Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part I," *Screen* 16.1 (1975), 7–77; and Stephen Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part II," *Screen* 16.2 (1975), 91–113. For a bit more discussion of the Heath essay's relation to interpretation, see Chapter 9. pp. 232–33.

11. The reference to psychologizing about the appeal of difficult films concerns an essay in an early issue of *Cinema Journal*: Norman N. Holland, "The Puzzling Movies: Their Appeal," *The Journal of the Society of Cinematologists* 3 (1963), 17–28.
12. For examples of work in the field of cultural studies that I label interpretation, see Therese Grisham, "Twentieth Century *Theatrum Mundi*: Olrike Ottinger's Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia," *Wide Angle* 14.2 (1992), 22–27 and David E. James, "Toward a Geo-Cinematic Hermeneutic: Representations of Los Angeles in Non-Industrial Cinema—*Killer of Sheep* and *Water and Power*," *Wide Angle* 20.3 (1998), 23–53. By contrast, I classify as cultural studies Tom Gunning's "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and *Traffic in Souls* (1913)," *Wide Angle* 19.4 (1997), 25–61. Again, by way of contrast, I label as history an earlier, less theoretically informed, example of cultural studies: John H. Weiss, "An Innocent Eye: The Career and Documentary Vision of Georges Rouquler up to 1945," *Cinema Journal* 20.2 (1981), 38–62.
13. The metacritical examination of readings of *The Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942) is John Berks, "What Alice Does: Looking Otherwise at *The Cat People*," *Cinema Journal* 32.1 (1992), 26–42. The response, by one of the critics whom Berks had mentioned, is Karen Hollinger, "On John Berks's 'What Alice Does: Looking Otherwise at *The Cat People*," *Cinema Journal* 33.1 (1993), 55–57.
14. Volume 14 (1974–75) was comprised of three issues, the result of the inclusion, that year, of the journal's first special issue.
15. See *Cinema Journal*, 14.2 (1974–75): Special Issue: Symposium on the Methodology of Film History; 15.2 (1976): Special Issue: American Film History; and 18.2 (1979): Special Issue: Economic and Technological History.
16. See David Bordwell, "Introduction," *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1996), pp. xiii–xvii.
17. See John L. Fell, "Darling, This Is Bigger Than Both of Us," *Cinema Journal* 12.2 (1973), 56–64; Elisabeth H. Lyon, "Louis Bunuel, "The Process of Dissociation in Three Films," *Cinema Journal* 13.1 (1973), 45–48; and Birgitta Steene, "Images and Words in Ingmar Bergman's Films," *Cinema Journal* 10.1 (1970), 24.
18. See Donald E. Staples, "The Auteur Theory Reexamined," *Cinema Journal* 6 (1966–67), 1–7; and Peter Harcourt, "What, Indeed, Is Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 8.1 (1968), 22–28.
19. See David A. Cook, "Some Structural Approaches to Cinema: A Survey of Models," *Cinema Journal* 14.3 (1975), 41–54.
20. By my count, twenty-four of the one hundred and thirty-nine articles published during this stretch included significant attention to textual detail.

21. By my count, 74 of the 281 essays published included analysis of textual meaning.
22. See Tag Gallagher's vituperative condemnation of feminist theory's incursions into the field, a process he describes in terms of infestation: "Tag Gallagher Responds to Tania Modleski's 'Time and Desire in the Woman's Film' (*Cinema Journal* Spring 1984) and Linda Williams's '"Something Else besides a Mother": *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama' (*Cinema Journal* Fall 1984)," *Cinema Journal* 25.2 (1986), 65–66.
23. See Jean Mitry, Martin Sopocy, and Paul Attallah, "Thomas H. Ince: His Esthetic, His Films, His Legacy," *Cinema Journal* 22.2 (1983), 2–25; Charles Musser, "American Vitagraph: 1897–1901," *Cinema Journal* 22.3 (1983), 4–46; and D. William Davis, "A Tale of Two Movies: Charlie Chaplin, United Artists, and the Red Scare," *Cinema Journal* 27.1 (1987), 47–62.
24. An example of an essay designed to explore the cultural functioning of a given trope or type would be Mimi White, "Representing Romance: Reading/Writing/Fantasy and the 'Liberated' Woman of Recent Hollywood Films," *Cinema Journal* 28.3 (1989), 41–56. The essay discusses a number of movies, but the movies themselves are not what is of interest. What is of interest is the deployment in them all of a certain image of woman. For an example of an essay identifying a historical shift in cultural understanding, see William Boddy, "Approaching *The Untouchables*: Social Science and Moral Panics in Early Sixties Television," *Cinema Journal* 35.4 (1996), 70–87, which examines the way contemporary controversy (in the form of Congressional debates) over the television series *The Untouchables* marked a shift in the public's understanding of the "role of television in society" (70).
25. Between the fall of 1982 and the fall of 1999, *Cinema Journal* published, by my count (which excludes introductions to special sections, brief editorials, and book reviews) 281 pieces of writing. In the period from winter 2000 to fall 2015, that number jumps to 695.
26. The percentages depend, again, on how we count the essays in the In Focus section of the journal. Equally weighting everything published produces the following percentages (taking just the top three categories): History 52%; Cultural Studies 16%; Interpretation 14%. If we exclude the In Focus essays altogether, those numbers change as follows: History 37%; Interpretation 24%; Cultural Studies 20%. Counting as I have done, with the In Focus work figured at half the weight of the other essays, produces these numbers: History 48%; Interpretation 17%; Cultural Studies 16%.
27. If we weight all the material, including that published in the In Focus section, equally, that number drops to fourteen percent. If we exclude the material from In Focus altogether it increases to twenty-four percent.

28. There are personal accounts of teaching experiences, editorials on the troubles besetting efforts at teaching film at the secondary level, reports on experiments in film pedagogy. See, e.g., Roger Watkins, "Film and Television: A Main Subject Course at Bulmershe College of Education," *Screen* 10.1 (1969), 34–41; Elfreda Symonds, "The Development of Film Study at Hammersmith College for Further Education," *Screen* 10.1 (1969), 42–66; and Roger Hudson, "Camera Adventure: An Experiment in Hornsey," *Screen* 10.2 (1969), 56–68.
29. Auteurist film theory is a consistent preoccupation of *Screen*'s during this two-year period (and beyond). A kind of fragment of an ongoing dialog begins with Alan Lovell taking issue with the work of Robin Wood. While Lovell is sympathetic to Wood's auteurist approach, he wants to see film studies move away from its grounding in a "Leavisian critical method" (49). In the following issue of the journal, Wood responds, which prompts a response, in turn, by Lovell. Both writers are trying to work out what it might mean to do serious film criticism, with Lovell calling for more rigorous interpretation and less evaluation, and Wood insisting that criticism is an art, not a science, and thus deeply personal, but the whole of the discussion is framed by their shared commitment to auteurism. See Alan Lovell, "Robin Wood: A Dissenting View," *Screen* 10.2 (1969), 42–55; Robin Wood, "Ghostly Paradigm and H.C.F.: An Answer to Alan Lovell," *Screen* 10.3 (1969), 35–48; and Alan Lovell, "The Common Pursuit of True Judgement," *Screen* 11.4/5 (1970), 76–88.

    The issue of auteurism gets addressed in other ways as well. Edward Buscombe, who becomes an early proponent of situating interpretation in historical context, uses an essay on genre to push against the focus on auteurism, which, he argues, is not very adept at assessing genre films. See Edward Buscombe, "The Idea of Genre in American Cinema," *Screen* 11.2 (1970), 33–45. Richard Collins then takes issue with Buscombe's argument and writes in support of auteurist approaches to film. See Richard Collins, "Genre: A Reply to Ed Buscombe," *Screen* 11.4/5 (1970), 66–75.
30. This concern about the rigor of contemporary film criticism was expressed directly in the theoretical debates about auteurism (see n. 29 above). But it was also expressed in the book reviews that were being published at this time. See, e.g., David Spiers's review of Elizabeth Sussex's book on Lindsay Anderson (*Screen* 11.2 [1970], 88–90): "Too often 'criticism' means little more than a fairly detailed description of the films themselves" (88).
31. Editorial Board, "Editorial," *Screen* 12.1 (1971), 4.
32. Sam Rohdie, "Education and Criticism: Notes on Work to Be Done," 9–14; Terry Lovell, "Sociology and the Cinema," 15–26; Jean-Luc [sic] Comolli and Paul [sic] Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," 27–38; Claire Johnston, "Film Journals: Britain and France," 39–48; Ben Brewster,

"Structuralism in Film Criticism," 49–58; and Ashley Pringle, "TV Studies: An Introduction to a Critique of Television," 63–71. All in *Screen* 12.1 (1971).

33. See, esp., in this regard, Volume 12, Number 3 (1971), which documents the crisis at the BFI and SEFT, precipitated in no small part by *Screen*'s turn to theory: Eileen Brock, Alan Lovell, et al., "An Open Letter to the Staff of the British Film Institute," 2–8; Editorial Board, "Editorial," 9–12; Alan Lovell, "The BFI and Film Education," 13–26.
34. Having published a translation of Comolli and Narboni's "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" in the spring of 1971, *Screen* followed up with translations of editorial sniping between *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique* in the summer issue. See Gérard Leblanc, "Directions," 121; Jean-Paul Fargier, "Parenthesis or Indirect Route," 131–44; and Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism 2," 145–55. All in *Screen* 12.2 (1971).
35. Much of Volume 12, Number 4 (1971/72), for example, is devoted to presentation of translated texts drawn from the Soviet journals *LEF* and *Novy LEF*. *Screen*, here, is following the lead of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which had devoted a special issue to Russian theory from the 1920s. See *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 220–221 (May/June 1970), *Russie années vignt*, which includes translations into French of work by Vladimir Lenin, Sergei Eisenstein, Yuri Tynyanov, and others.
36. *Screen* uses the occasion of reviewing the recently published *Movie Reader* and V. F. Perkins's *Film as Film* to fire a broadside at all those associated with the journal *Movie*. See Sam Rohdie, "*Movie Reader* and *Film as Film*," *Screen* 13.4 (1972/73), 135–45. "All hope of a theoretical, scientific view of cinema, abstract and specifying, was ruled out," Rohdie argues, "by this approach" (138). *Screen* picks up the attack again when *Movie*, after a three-year hiatus, returns to publication: "With n 20, *Movie* re-appears after a gap of three years. That period has seen the emergence of Marxism, semiology and structuralism into the field of film study in this country. The arrival of these disciplines has resulted in a concerted theoretical attack on much that *Movie* held dear and on much that constituted its critical methods and assumptions. *Movie* and its writers have now had ample opportunity to re-consider and re-assess these methods and assumptions in the light of this attack, but, as the new issue reveals, any re-consideration and re-assessment there has in the main ended with an affirmation of the former concerns, positions and values, despite numerous demonstrations of their inadequacies" (Steve Neal, in "Film Culture," *Screen* 16.3 [1975], 112).
37. See Philip Rosen, "*Screen* and 1970s Film Theory," *Inventing Film Studies*, pp. 264–97. Rosen identifies the journal's preoccupations, as the subhead-

ings have it, as "Filmic Realism and Ideology" (270), "Textuality" (274), and "The Filmic Enunciation and Theory of the Subject" (277).

38. See Stephen Heath, "*Anato mo*," *Screen* 17.4 (1976/77), 49–66.
39. The tensions involved in this particular transformation of the journal are too complicated to detail here, but in broad-brush terms they concern *Screen*'s role in the educational mission of SEFT (inasmuch as the abstruse theorizing that served as center of interest at *Screen* throughout the 70s seemed to many to be inaccessible to the teachers and working-class students whom it was SEFT's mission to serve) and *Screen*'s relation to the academy, with which it was becoming increasingly (and thus, for many, problematically) engaged and intertwined. For a fuller account of these issues, see Terry Bolas, *Screen Education: From Film Appreciation to Media Studies* (Intellect, 2009), esp. Chap. 8, "Screen Saviors," pp. 227–58 and Chap. 9, "SEFT Limited," pp. 259–91.
40. See https://lfq.salisbury.edu/about.html.
41. Enrique Fernández, "'Witnesses Always Everywhere': The Rhetorical Strategies of *Memories of Underdevelopment*," *Wide Angle* 4.2 (1980), 52, hereafter cited in text.
42. Sandy Flitterman, "*Guest in the House*: Rupture and Reconstitution of the Bourgeois Nuclear Family," *Wide Angle* 4.2 (1980), 19, hereafter cited in text.
43. Christopher Orr, "Closure and Containment: Marylee Hadlee in *Written on the Wind*," *Wide Angle* 4.2 (1980), 29, hereafter cited in text.
44. Frank Krutnik, "*The Shanghai Gesture*: The Exotic and the Melodrama," *Wide Angle* 4.2 (1980), 36, hereafter cited in text.
45. Bryan Crow, "The Cinematic and the Melodramatic in *A Woman of Affairs*," *Wide Angle* 4.2 (1980), 44, hereafter cited in text.
46. See William Luhr and Peter Lehman, "The Case of the Missing Pipe Cinch: Blake Edwards' *Gunn* in the Context of His Genre Films," *Wide Angle* 1.1 (1976), 38–51.
47. See Dean McWilliams, "The Ritual Cinema of Yukio Mishima," *Wide Angle* 1.4 (1977), 28–33.
48. See James Leach, "Notes on Polanski's Cinema of Cruelty," *Wide Angle* 2.1 (1978), 32–39.
49. See, e.g., Alexandre Astruc, "'Sherrif' Alexandre Astruc Does Justice to Howard Hawks," tr. Dorothea Hoekzema, *Wide Angle* 1.2 (1976), 4–6 (originally published in *Paris-Match*, 1108 (August 1, 1970); and Marie Claire Willeumier, "On Fashion," tr. Dorothea Hoekzema, *Wide Angle* 1.3 (1976), 14–16 (originally published in *Esprit*, 2, February 1965 as "De la mode").
50. See Nick Browne, "The Politics of Form in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," 4–11; Alan Williams, "The Camera-Eye and the Film: Notes on Vertov's

'Formalism,'" 12–17; Lucy Fischer, "Dr. Mabuse and Mr. Lang," 18–26; and Deborah Linderman, "Uncoded Images and the Heterogeneous Text," 34–41, all in *Wide Angle* 3.3 (1979).

51. See Michael Budd, "Authorship as Commodity: The Art Cinema and the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*," 12–19; Christopher Orr, "Authorship in the Hawks/Wyler Film *Come and Get It*," 20–26; and Peter Baxter, "The One Woman," 35–41, all in *Wide Angle* 6.1 (1984).
52. For the analytical essay, see Paul F. Starrs, "The Ways of the Western: Mor(t)ality & Landscape in Cormac McCarthy's Novels and Sergio Leone's Films," 63–74; the essay on National Geographic photography is Barry C. Bishop, "Machu Puchari: Places and Peoples on Pages and Screens," 31–33; the pedagogical project is Rachel Strickland, "5 Exercises in Place and Recording," 42–47; the essay on creative media projects is Michael Naimark, "Presence at the Interface; or, Sense of Place/Essence of Place," 50–61; all in *Wide Angle* 15.4 (1993). The various personal reflections are as follows: Bernard Nietschmann, "Authentic, State, and Virtual Geography in Film," 5–12; Brenda Laurel, "Art and Activism in VR," 13–21; Philip E. Agre, "Landscape and Identity: A Note on the History of the Suburbs," 22–29; Widdicombe Schmidt, "Not Just Another Pretty Place: Some Reflections," 35–40; again, all in *Wide Angle* 15.4 (1978).
53. See Kimberly SaRee Tomes, "Shu Lea Cheang: Hi-Tech Aborigine: Interview," 3–15; Paula Rabinowitz, "Stairmaster Yeats: An Epic," 17–35; John L. Butler, C.A.S., "Sound Bites and Bytes: An Introduction to Microphones," 37–46; and Alan Wright, "A Wrinkle in Time: The Child, Memory, and *The Mirror*," 47–68; all in *Wide Angle* 18.1 (1996).
54. An online only successor version, *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, began publication in 2010, putting out one volume a year. At present that journal, which has strong ties, in terms of approach and personnel, to the original *Movie*, has, according the web site, gone to a "rolling publication model."
55. For the panel discussion, see Ian Cameron et al., "The Return of *Movie*," 1–25; see, also, Charles Barr, "Approaching Television," 26–28; Douglas Pye, "Genre and Movies," 29–43; all in *Movie* 20 (1975).
56. See Andrew Britton, "The Ideology of *Screen*," *Movie* 26 (Winter 1978–79), 2–28.
57. Ian Cameron, "Films, Directors, and Critics," *Movie* 2 (1962), 5.
58. See V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 7.
59. See N. A. Morris, "In Defence of *Fatal Attraction*," *Movie* 33 (1989), 53–55.
60. Mark Shivas, "*The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*," *Movie* 4 (1962), 6.
61. Mark Shivas, "Two Views of *Le Caporal Epinglé*: One," *Movie* 4 (1962), 11.

62. Ian Cameron, "Two Views of *Le Caporal Epinglé*: Two," *Movie* 4 (1962), 12.
63. Robin Wood, "Attitudes in *Advise and Consent*," *Movie* 4 (1962), 14–17.
64. Paul Mayersberg, "*Le Rendez-vous de minuit*," *Movie* 4 (1962), 34.
65. Paul Mayersberg, "*Carmen Jones* and *Porgy and Bess*," *Movie* 4 (1962), 21.
66. Mark Shivas, "The Password is Cleaning Coths," *Movie* 4 (1962), 30.
67. V. F. Perkins, "*Giant*," *Movie* 4 (1962), 31–33.
68. Ian Cameron, "The Limits of Suspense," *Movie* 4 (1962), 26–27. The film was originally released in the United Kingdom under the title *Grip of Fear*, the title Cameron uses in his review.
69. Robin Wood, "Persona," *Movie* 15 (1968), 22–23, hereafter cited in text.
70. Paul Mayersberg, "Huston's Reflections," *Movie* 15 (1968), 25, hereafter cited in text.
71. Raymond Durgnat, "Bunuel: Belle de Jour 1: Love in the Afternoon," *Movie* 15 (1968), 27–29.
72. Robin Wood, "Bunuel: Belle de Jour 2: At Night All Cats Are Grey," *Movie* 15 (1968), 31.
73. Richard Winkler, "*Far from Vietnam*," *Movie* 15 (1968), 34–36.
74. See Robin Wood, "Smart Ass & Cutie Pie," *Movie* 21 (1975), 1–17.
75. Jim Hillier, "*Jennifer on My Mind*," *Movie* 21 (1975), 18.
76. See Douglas Pye, "*Junior Bonner*," *Movie* 21 (1975), 22–25.
77. Tom Ryan, "*The Pursuit of Happiness*," *Movie* 21 (1975), 27.
78. See Richard Dyer, "*The Towering Inferno*," *Movie* 21 (1975), 30–33.
79. Terrence Butler, "*Two-Lane Blacktop*," *Movie* 21 (1975), 34–37.
80. *Cinema Journal*, the only one of the four journals surveyed that was conceived as an academic journal rather than a magazine, reviews books; but after the first issue, it stopped reviewing movies.
81. Other anomalies mark *Movie* as well. Very few of the essays, only three percent, focus on theory (compared to eleven percent at *Cinema Journal*, twenty-five percent at *Screen*, and fourteen percent at *Wide Angle*). And cultural studies, which, on average, concerns about fourteen percent of the work in the other journals surveyed, accounts for just four percent of the work in *Movie*.

CHAPTER 6

In Defense of Interpretation: The Mind of the Movie/The World of the Film

Values-oriented defenses of literature have been a staple of literary history in the West for centuries—if not millennia. After all, depending on how much pressure one wants to put on the idea of catharsis, Aristotle's *Poetics* might be thought of as an argument for the social, cultural, and religious significance of tragedy as a form. And the philosophical and social value of poetry has been defended by Renaissance writers, Romantics, and Victorians. Liberal humanists and Marxists alike, during the first half of the twentieth century, championed the novel on ethical and political grounds. To be sure, there was a brief turning away from such values-oriented arguments, at least within the academy, during much of the second half of the twentieth century. But by the 90s, the interest in returning to thinking about literature in relation to values was sufficiently explicit and broadly felt as to warrant a name, "the ethical turn." Literature, or the literary (sometimes the novelistic) has found defenders among humanists, poststructuralists, feminists, and postcolonialists. Much of this work recently has been influenced by, or explicitly draws upon, the writings of Emanuel Levinas. And almost all of it images the ethical value of literature in (loosely) Levinasian terms, as a staging of an encounter with alterity. The levels of discomfort imagined to be involved in such an encounter, the extent to which it entails confronting sheer difference, vary from writer to writer, but all consider the reader's engagement with the literary text as creating the conditions of possibility for an ethical acknowledgment of the

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_6

other and an ethical recognition of the limits of the self. These are ideas I will return to.

No such turn to ethics has occurred in film studies. Like literary studies, film studies did experience an historical turn in the 80s when both disciplines took up the causes of the new historicism and cultural materialism. But the academy hasn't ever jumped to the defense of the filmic in quite the same way as it jumped, in the 90s and after, to the defense of the literary. Which is not to say that considerations of value have had no bearing on, or place within, film studies. Quite the contrary. Soviet filmmakers and scholars quite early on, for example, saw the political value of film, which Lenin famously considered to be the most effective means of shaping and directing the political sensibilities of the masses. The surrealists, near the same time, were finding in film an especially amenable means of advancing their liberationist project. And the kind of cinephilia that underwrote the emergence, after the Second World War, of the film clubs and film societies and film journals out of which modern film studies developed was surely grounded in some sense of the value of the movies—even if that value for the most part went unarticulated except in Aristotelian (that is, comparative aesthetic) terms. Moreover, the types of ideological critique that have dominated the discipline of film studies almost since its inception are clearly values oriented. When the French film journal *Cinéthique* launched in 1969, the writers for the journal saw their work as political intervention, as intellectual labor designed to remake the world. As Gérard Leblanc put the point, in an essay reprinted in *Screen* in 1971: "The class struggle is not an external phenomenon for us; we are right in it.… Our work takes the form of a magazine."[1] Similarly, when Laura Mulvey, in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," draws attention to the ways mainstream Hollywood cinema reinforces and reinscribes the patriarchal status quo, her explicit aim is the politically valuable transformation of filmmaking practices and viewing habits. Her insights spring from an engagement with film texts, but the essay presents as political manifesto. But what is conceived as being of value in both instances are the operations of the critic, not the phenomena—films, film types, film cultures—subject to those operations. Indeed, in the case of both examples—and this is true of most of the criticism that falls under the rubric of the hermeneutics of suspicion—movies have value only in a kind of negative sense. In themselves, imbricated as they are in systems of oppression, they are problematic, in fact harmful—of use, of value, only inasmuch as they serve as sites of a type of political intervention that takes the form of analysis. They are

good only because they allow the critic to draw attention to ideological processes broadly at play in the world. In the case of both of these, more or less classical, instances of ideological critique, were the projects of the critics to succeed, both the filmmaking practices under consideration, and the critical projects they have called into being, would effectively be brought to an end.

I don't want to overgeneralize. The hermeneutics of suspicion, while predominantly negative, is not purely so. The critical project of *Cinéthique* alluded to above, for example, occasioned resistance among those associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, who, no less invested in the political consequences of their enterprise and no less committed to Marxist inflected analysis, nonetheless saw classical cinema as capable of containing progressive features and of producing politically progressive texts. Similarly, Fredric Jameson, suggesting that a purely negative focus of ideological analysis is necessarily incomplete, argues that, because "genuine social and historical content must be first trapped and given some initial expression if it is subsequently to be the object of successful manipulation and containment … we cannot do justice to the ideological function of works like [Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975)] unless we are willing to concede the presence within them of … what I will call … their Utopian or transcendent potential—that dimension of even the most degraded type of mass culture which remains implicitly, and no matter how faintly, negative and critical of the social order from which … it springs."[2] And feminist film studies has at this point a long and extensive history of attending to the ideological complexities, the tensions and contradictions, that mark classical Hollywood films.

Then too, of course, the hermeneutics of suspicion isn't the only form ideologically committed criticism can take. A significant subsection of feminist film criticism, for example, is oriented toward celebrating women's contributions to film as art and form of cultural production. Postcolonial criticism focused on third cinema film texts is also often celebratory rather than suspicious.

But the focus of ideological film analysis, despite these sorts of countercurrents, has quite clearly been the unmasking of variously oppressive, regressive, or reactionary processes at work in mainstream fiction films. Rita Felski, in a recent defense of literature whose arguments I will make use of later in the chapter, cites this orientation toward the negative in the hermeneutics of suspicion, a hermeneutic practice that dominated both

literary and film studies for decades, as a rationale for her argument that we need to find new approaches to literary analysis:

> There is a dawning sense among literary and cultural critics that a shape of thought has grown old. We know only too well the well-oiled machine of ideology critique, the x-ray gaze of symptomatic reading, the smoothly rehearsed moves that add up to a hermeneutics of suspicion. Ideas that seemed revelatory thirty years ago—the decentered subject! the social construction of reality!—have dwindled into shopworn slogans; defamiliarizing has lapsed into doxa, no less dogged and often dogmatic as the certainties it sought to disrupt. And what virtue remains in the act of unmasking when we know full well what lies beneath the mask? More and more critics are venturing to ask what is lost when a dialogue with literature gives way to permanent diagnosis, when the remedial reading of texts loses sight of why we are drawn to such texts in the first place.[3]

Felski's response to this sense of a settled routinization of literary studies is to argue for the uses of literature, to make a case for the good that comes from our encounters with literary texts. In what follows, I would like to do the same for film—more particularly, as the argument develops, for the value of the specific kind of encounter with film texts that interpretation requires.

* * *

One of the most common defenses of literature is that it constitutes a way of knowing, and/or that the literary is, in itself, a body of knowledge. "What does literature know?" Felski asks, for example, at the outset of the chapter she devotes to the subject. And both she and Martha Nussbaum, the writer whose work is surely most associated with this line of thought, answer the question in related ways. Both, for example, see the form of the expression as central to the knowledge being conveyed. "The telling itself," as Nussbaum puts the point, "expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life's relations and connections."[4] Like Felski, Nussbaum focuses on narrative fiction, which she sees as having special relevance for moral philosophy, her particular purview, arguing "that certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist" (5). Felski's echoic formulation: "A novel such as *The House of Mirth* unfolds a social

phenomenology, a rendering of the qualities of a life-world, that is formally distinct from either non-fiction or theoretical argument" (89). Or Nussbaum yet again: "Built into the very structure of a novel is a conception of what matters" (26).

Both Felski and Nussbaum see the particular knowledge on offer in narrative fiction as tied to, even dependent on, fiction's capacity to render subjective experience, to show us the ways a given mind and sensibility might function under given conditions, to offer us, not so much an *open sesame* to other minds, but a sense of what such access might be and feel like. The centrality of subjectivity to Nussbaum's account of literature as knowledge is most apparent in her choice of examples: the works of James, Proust, and Beckett; passages that focus on the workings, at a particular moment, of a particular fictional mind. She begins a section of an essay entitled "An Aristotelian Conception of Rationality," for example, with a nearly fifteen-hundred word long extract from James's *The Golden Bowl* entirely taken up with the depiction of "Maggie Verver's deliberation" (85), at the end of the novel, about how to respond to the situation in which events have placed her. Felski is more direct: "While the plots of history and fiction share certain features … the novel is distinguished at the level of discourse in various ways, including, most notably, its ability to read minds" (89).

It is not just the play of mind that interests these writers, however. Their central concern is fiction's capacity to show the ways minds play in relation to other minds. Citing the work of George Butte, Felski discusses the sense of "deep intersubjectivity" reflected in fiction. "What Wharton's novel gives us … is not just anthropology, but phenomenology: a literary rendering of how worlds create selves, but also of how selves perceive and react to worlds made up of other selves" (91).[5] Such work, she argues, has "theoretical and philosophical" value: it "enriches and deepens our sense of history and habitus, of *mentalité* and modes of sociability" (92). For Nussbaum the kind of embeddedness we see in fiction of individual subjects in networks of social relations and materially determinate contexts is chiefly of interest, as the discussion of Maggie Verver suggests, for the way such embeddedness bears on questions of moral judgment.

The ways that fictional characters are seen to behave, Nussbaum argues, serve a tutorial function—not just in specific instances (specific actions or decisions, for example), but in general as a property of the form. By their very nature, that is, novels show us how moral choices should best be made and so address what she sees as the best starting point for an enquiry

into ethics, the Aristotelian question, "How should a human being live?" (25). And throughout her work on literature's relation to moral philosophy she aligns the ethical vision she finds in novels with the view of ethics she finds in Aristotle, arguing that both are grounded in the following four principles: a recognition of the "noncommensurability of the valuable things"; a commitment to the "priority of perceptions (priority of the particular)"; an awareness of the "ethical value of the emotions"; and a sense of the "ethical value of uncontrolled happenings."[6] Life, on Nussbaum's view always contains the potential for tragedy, inasmuch as living can put us into situations where we are obliged to choose between competing "actions or commitments" that are not equitable, the choice thus entailing harm or loss. Narrative fiction focuses on just such choices, such situations. As a matter of form, they make clear that such decisions are only made, can only be made, in specific, nonrepeatable contexts—that there are very few general rules that can guide us through all the multifarious choices life puts before us. The particularity of context, as well as one's capacity to discern all the concrete particularities that constitute a given context, is crucial. Novels help us see this. They also help us see the limits of human agency, the extent to which contingency shapes context. Again, that is, they serve a tutorial function: "A large part of learning," Nussbaum writes, "takes place in the experience of the concrete. This experiential learning, in turn, requires the cultivation of perception and responsiveness: the ability to read a situation, singling out what is relevant for thought and action. This active task is not a technique; one learns it by guidance rather than by a formula." (44). Our choices and commitments as readers mirror the choices and commitments made by writers and fictional characters. Reading is a practice of discernment.

Felski, too, sees the novel as concerned with conveying "context sensitive knowledge" (93), with capturing concrete particularities, figured in terms of discrete "ideolects" (95), and with modeling modes of perception and forms of decision-making: "*The House of Mirth* does not just depict a network of social discriminations and judgments, it also enfolds readers, through its inculcation of countless examples, into an experiential familiarity with the logic of such judgments, with what we might call a feel for the game" (92). In addition, Felski sees a value in literature's capacity to render what we might think of as the "thinginess" of the world—concrete particularities of a different sort. Here, her examples shift mainly to poetry, but she also identifies the "nineteenth-century novel … as the quintessential archive of objects" (98).

My main concern here is simply to suggest that the values Nussbaum and Felski attribute to novels and reading also characterize movies and watching (watching conceived, of course, as a form of reading). Later essays in the book, the chapters on *Chinatown* (1974) and *Memento* (2000), both of which focus on the ethical decisions and capacities of discernment of their protagonists, will, I think, make clear the ways movies serve the kind of tutorial function that is the center of Nussbaum's concern. In what follows here, I want to focus on the other central values Nussbaum and Felski associate with narrative fiction: its ability, on the one hand, to render subjective and intersubjective experience; its capacity, on the other, to evince or reveal the sheer thinginess of things.

To take the last point first: it seems to me demonstrably the case that movies are more intimately tied to objects, better at conjuring the materiality of the world, its abundance and textural density, than are literary texts of any sort. In part this has to do with the physical properties involved in photographic reproduction. "[Y]ou can't photograph something unless it's physically present before the camera," as David Sterritt once put the point, "which anchors cinema more solidly in the material world than arts like music or literature."[7] More classically: "The photographic image," André Bazin long ago wrote, "shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model."[8] Whatever objections one might want to raise concerning the potential naiveté of such a statement, one has to admit that there is a compelling kernel of truth to realist theories of film, despite their limitations. Because filming a subject involves a physical interaction between what is being recorded and the apparatus doing the recording, because what we're seeing when we're looking at a filmed image is the light that bounced off a part of the world and that was captured, at a determinate moment in time and within a circumscribed field, by the film or photoelectrical cells of the camera, there exists in the photographed image, a kind of hauntingly poignant proximity between representation and referent.[9] That poignancy cuts in two directions, of course, signaling absences as well as presences.[10] But the aching sense of the former depends on the haunting sense of the latter and it is the latter I want to focus on here.

Think of any scene, any given image, from any film—even from the most austere of filmmakers, an Ozu, a Bresson, a Dreyer: the material world beckons. Just for instance, in a series of shots from *Tokyo Story* (Tôkyô monogatari, 1953) that has become a standard example of a filmmaker's use of off-screen space, a woman wanders through a home

cleaning up. The camera—set, as is typical for Ozu, at a point about three feet from the floor, reflecting the perspective one would have sitting on a tatami mat—remains stationary during relatively long takes as the woman moves in and out of view through the various doors of the dwelling. Every minute or so, a direct cut positions us in a different hallway in the house, watching the woman come and go. In the opening shot, after the woman has left, we simply watch the empty space. But, strikingly, if we attend to what we are looking at, as we are surely being invited to do, the space—and therefore the image—is not empty at all. Indeed both space and image are cluttered, despite what we would be apt to describe as the sparseness of the furnishing. We are looking through a series of doorways from one room, through another, to the outside of a neighbor's home—a series of frames inside other frames. Within the first, on the left, against a wall next to the first open passageway, stands a cabinet covered in books piled in a haphazard manner. On one stack of books on the top of the cabinet sits a child's toy, a type of ring-toss game made of wood. In the right foreground is a small wooden stool with a fabric cushion. On the wall behind that, a calendar, decorated with images of dolls, only partially in view. Barely discernable at the lower right is some sort of ceramic jar. Through the passageway, we see an open room, covered with mats. A few books, a few bits of clothing lie indiscriminately on the floor. A single light, its bulb visible under a shallow cone of shade, hangs suspended in the middle of the room, framed for us by a picture on the wall above the outside door behind it. Through that door, beyond the wooden railing of a porch, we see the front of the neighboring house: beneath an awning, glass panes of a large window partially obscured by a wooden blind; clothes of various sorts hung out to dry on wooden poles suspended between hooks on the side of the house; a decorative paper lantern. This space, the very emptiness of which has become iconic, is in fact awash in material objects. It is busy with shapes and textures. And other shot setups in the sequence are even richer in visual detail, more crammed with things, most so dense in fact that cataloguing what we see would require pages and pages of description. Here, of course, in Ozu's film, the uninflected details, the array of random objects, work to provide the viewer with a feel for the daily life of a middle-class Japanese family living in Tokyo in 1953. But nearly every frame in nearly every narrative fiction film is full this way, is filled, in just this fashion, with fragments of the real (Image 6.1).

And it is not just the richness of the world, its clutter, the sheer proliferation of things that gets foregrounded by film, by *being* filmed. The

Image 6.1 The look of the world

materiality of matter, its density, its thinginess, is a persistent focus of attention. In movie comedies, for example, the intractability of objects regularly serves as a source of humor. The stars of silent comedies, to take a more particular focus, constantly bump into the otherness, if I can be allowed the phrase, of their physical environments, are forced to work against the resistance of *things*. I am thinking, say, of Keaton battling his ill-framed and lopsided house in *One Week* (1920).[11] Or, in a thematically related film, *The Finishing Touch* (1928), of Stan Laurel finding himself at odds with the frame of a window he is trying to set into a house, the frame becoming so inimical to his intentions as to seem to have agency: parts break off, enframe him, swing round to give him a smack. Such scenes—and others very like them—are a mainstay of silent cinema. In Keaton's *The Cameraman* (1928), the Keaton character at one point takes his girl to a public swimming pool. The two of them stand at water's edge and she walks out onto a shelf just below the water's surface that Keaton doesn't see. He, standing right next to her, walks out as well but the shelf doesn't extend to where he is standing, so, expecting to walk, he instead drops like a stone. When he surfaces, he swims to follow her but his first stroke pulls him up onto the still unseen shelf, where he continues to try to swim—in

some weird way almost literalizing the metaphor of a fish out of water. Finally realizing his position, he stands and begins to walk, only to drop once again like a stone at the end of the shelf, whose dimensions he still doesn't quite grasp. The persistent unreliability of the material world, bafflingly alien, prods us to attend to shape, consistency, density, volume.

To be sure, the encounter between silent film comic and wayward reality occasionally ends in triumph rather than tragedy. In a single chase sequence in Harold Lloyd's *Girl Shy* (1924), Harold stands up in and then simply walks out of one moving automobile, climbs into the back seat of another, stands up again to grab onto a tree branch that the car is passing beneath, to turn, finally, like a gymnast, and drop into the saddle of a waiting horse. But the real master during the silent period at producing these moments of what seems to be the casual transcendence of physical limitations was, of course, Keaton. In one sequence near the end of *Seven Chances* (1925), the acrobatic actor (Cavell refers to "the Olympic resourcefulness of his body" [37]) jumps a gorge, throws himself headlong down a sandy slope, somersaulting full length in long beautiful arches, runs full tilt down a series of steep slopes followed by a rockslide, vaults a horse-drawn carriage, hits the ground face forward, again at full tilt, to slide beneath a car in the manner of a baseball player stealing home, and runs across a railroad track in front of an oncoming train. But such triumphs, such moments of grace, are funny precisely because they seem impossible; the sense of wonder they generate derives from our understanding the degree of difficulty involved in the stunt, our knowledge that whatever trick we are watching required uncanny agility and perfect timing. The humor, in other words, results from our awareness of the physical difficulties being overcome. The physical world and its accouterments impinge on our consciousness while watching these stunts in the form of a threat, a sense of unease that the success of the stunt serves to dispel. We marvel at the agility and bravery because we know real risks are being run.

Obviously enough, the sort of attentiveness to thinginess I have been discussing is not exclusive to silent film. Just to take one more recent example, consider the way viewer attention is drawn to the physical properties—size, shape, weight—of a host of everyday objects that factor into the slapstick moments of *Home Alone* (1990): handfuls of fake pearls, glossy and round, tossed onto a street as obstacle, bounce and ricochet and roll; tiny, cast iron toy cars and trains and planes, whose rigidity and irregular shape register, almost like a memory, as a result of seeing the pain they inflict on bare feet; old-fashioned glass Christmas tree ornaments,

whose dangerous fragility—that impossible-seeming thinness of the glass—is revealed when Kevin (Macaulay Culkin) uses them as a weapon. We feel the weight of bodies in free fall as the bad guys stumble and slam to the ground, the solidity of a standard issue clothes iron as it drops fifteen feet onto an upturned face, the heft of a full can of paint as, swung pendulum-like at the end of a rope, it careens off a head.

Beyond imparting a sense of materiality as a general given of human experience, films also, like novels, have the capacity to provide us with the felt sense of what it might be like to inhabit particular worlds that are not our own, worlds from other times and other places, worlds that never existed or that can't exist. They show us what these worlds would look like (or would have looked like) and what it might be like (or might have been like) to move through specific but unfamiliar environments and to interact with the specific but unfamiliar objects that constitute that environment.

Consider, for example, what we learn about the appearance of the material world of 1930s America by watching *It happened One Night* (1934): that the profile of a yacht then, unlike now, would have been dominated by an immense smokestack and that the furniture on board might have been made of wicker; that the bodies of people considered to be attractive—both men and women—would have been differently configured, differently articulated, that in the case of both they would have been softer, less muscled, less rigidly defined than they are at present; that men and women alike would have typically worn hats and that men's ties would have fallen mid-chest rather than at the waist; that phones would have had separate mouthpieces and earpieces; that a newspaper editor's desk might have held, not just a lamp and desk set, but a glass cigar caddy with a metal lid; that pipe tobacco would have been held in zippered leather pouches; that the windows of commercial buses would have had drawable cloth drapes with tie-backs; that at that time helicopters were chimeric contraptions made by adding overhead rotating blades to a single-propeller airplane. We see 1930s wheelbarrows, with narrow wheels and four legs, wicker baby carriages, enamel coffee pots, and car handbrakes that are at least a yard long.

Granted, of course, the world we encounter when we are watching *It Happened One Night* is one that has been constructed for us. The interior apartment of the yacht we see early on surely never came anywhere near any actual water; and the interior of the bus probably sat somewhere proximate to the interior of the yacht. But much of the fictional world we are immersed in while watching the film is composed of real objects—real cars

and busses and trains, real pipes and umbrellas and bathrobes, real drapes and dresses and doorknobs. And there is every reason to believe that the world we see imaged in the movie would have been experienced as familiar by viewers seeing the film at the time of its release. Current viewers, or contemporary viewers from other countries and cultures, might well find the world of *It Happened One Night* to be mystifying, or quaint, or off putting. But the movie surely presents itself—by means of all the operations available to it (construction of character; continuity editing; narrative structure)—as a kind of solicitation, a summons to an encounter with the material contents of a world.

I want to push just a little harder on that last point, about cinema's ability to familiarize viewers with otherwise unfamiliar worlds, to afford viewers a felt sense of a given reality. Whenever I watch *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), I become fascinated by the odd cigarette lighter that appears at a couple of points over the course of the movie. I know the fascination is not mine alone, since one has only to begin a Google search using the terms "cigarette lighter Maltese Falcon" and the search engine will complete the phrase on its own, the search itself leading to pages of sites related to the lighter and at least three YouTube videos identifying it as a Ronson "Touch Tip," two of which demonstrate its use. The cigarette lighter, which looks in profile a bit like a small mantle clock, sits on a desk along with other bric-a-brac, in the inner office of Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart). In use, it comes across as a kind of magic match. Sam uses it twice. His secretary, Effie Perine (Lee Patrick), uses it once to light Sam's cigarette. Sam, of course, rolls his own, with tobacco shaken from a small draw-string pouch. He is an adept—as is Effie, for that matter. And the movements of cigarettes and magic match serve to define both characters as "cool," to imbue them both with a certain hipness that adds, in particular, to Sam's allure. Through this play, viewers get a sense of 40s cool, get a sense of the look and feel of it. One comes away thinking that, with a little practice and the right props, one could "play" 40s cool, that one would know how to mimic it. Again, we come away from our engagement with the film with a "feel for" a concretely imagined world, one now, inevitably, not our own. Felski refers to such knowledge as "knowing as."

It would be possible, of course, to produce an almost endless array of examples of this capacity film has to convey the feel of a given world, because at a fundamental level doing the work of conveying the felt experience of possible worlds, real and imagined, is just what narrative fiction film is for. In the interest of time and space, however, just two instances.

The first is the well-known sequence in *Umberto D* (1952) devoted to depicting the awakening and morning ritual of boarding house maid Maria (Maria Pia Casilio). The undercurrent of dramatic tension in the scene derives from Maria's preoccupation with her unwanted pregnancy, and the film pauses punctually throughout the sequence to consider Maria considering her predicament: in close-ups and medium close-ups, we watch as she contemplates, examines herself, cries a little. But the scene's main interest is in providing a sense of the felt reality of a young, working class woman living in Rome in the early 1950s. Maria, wakened by Umberto, watches a cat walk across the grubby skylight above her, rolls out of bed, wanders to the kitchen and a window, where she watches another cat cross an equally grubby skylight in a building below. She makes coffee and is eventually interrupted in her routine by someone at the door. As is the case with the scene from *Tokyo Story* discussed above, the setting is filled with objects of various sorts—too many, in this case, to catalog. And as in the earlier film, *Umberto D* is trying to give the viewer a sense of what it might feel like to live in this space—and here, to live *as* this woman. A central focus throughout is thus her interaction with some of the objects in the room: the (now) odd-seeming faucet with its single spigot and its length of hose or tubing; the gas stove, which Maria lights using wooden matches that she finds in a porcelain box on the wall, striking the matches, habitually, it is clear, on the stucco wall itself; the hand cranked coffee grinder; the door to the kitchen, which she stretches to close with her toe as she sits grinding the coffee; the stationary, quill pen, and ink pot she moves from the table to make room for the coming breakfast. To watch Maria move through this intricately detailed environment is, in a meaningful sense, to be transported to her world, a world that people like Maria, living in Rome in 1952, would have recognized as their own. This is not an incidental or inconsequential accomplishment.

My second example is not one sequence, but a series of them—the street scenes from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), those influential elements of the film's production design that have turned the world that Scott and his team imagined into a template for most subsequent forays into the genre of dystopian fiction film. We are first introduced to the atmospherics as Deckard, sitting in the recesses of a store window sheltering from the incessant downpour, waits for a spot at a street-side noodle bar. The mise-en-scene is dense with detail designed to render a world, to give the viewer a sense of what it might be like to negotiate these particular mean streets. The crowds, the low-slung ceiling of umbrellas

necessitated by the driving rain, create a kind of claustrophobia: we are never, while in the streets of 2019 L.A. (as imagined in 1982), given an expansive, clarifying view of the environment. When we are not in the Spinner cars, looking down on skyscrapers (the skyline dominated by the massive ziggurat of gold that is the Tyrell Corporate headquarters) and the refinery-like structures belching smoke and fire, we are at eye-level, jammed into a throng. We are engulfed in neon, bombarded by advertisement. We wander past or into schools of bicyclists weaving their way around burning trash, street people, graffiti covered columns in various states of decay. Video ads loom over us; a bony metal blimp-like hovercraft with a video display bears down on us. This world—a mash-up of New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, but dirtier, scruffier, more threatening, more exotic—is so indelibly, so compellingly presented that despite the air of menace, it generates an odd sort of thrilling appeal. Beautiful, terrifying, vibrant in its death throes, Blade Runner's L.A. is a place in which no one, surely, would want to live, but which most everyone, surely, would want to visit. And so we do. In the space of the film's duration, we come to an awareness—a kind of knowledge—of how it might feel to live in a world not quite our own, a world built from the principles that govern our world, and from the many of the same materials, but that exists only as a potentiality, one that we can examine, as it were, in advance.

What I am saying here about fiction film is related to a point Felksi makes concerning literary fiction: that through our experience of such texts "we come to know something of what it feels like to be inside a particular habitus, to experience a world as self-evident, to bathe in the waters of a way of life" (92).

As Felski acknowledges, both in the chapter concerning the kinds of knowledge one gains from engagements with literary texts and the chapter dealing with the kinds of recognitions occasioned by these encounters, there are dangers entailed by thinking in these terms. Decades of ideology critique have sensitized us to the possibility—often presented as the theoretical inevitability—of the sort of bathing Felski has in mind serving nefarious purposes. At a minimum, such immersion can function as a form of soporific, our visits to fictional worlds working the way Marx imagined visits to church working, literature (and film) becoming the new opiate of the masses. Bathing in a way of life, from this perspective, resembles a nice long soak in a hot tub, an escape from the conflicts and cultural contradictions we ought to be attuned to. More problematically still, such immersion, as neo-Marxists have been telling us, again for decades, constitutes a

form of cultural binding. The very familiarity we (think we) feel is the consequence of long, continuous processes of interpellation, of our being slowly sewn into the fabric of bourgeois, capitalist culture. In fact, film is more problematic than literary fiction in this respect, since, as a couple different strains of psychoanalytically inflected neo-Marxist film theory would have it, both the instruments involved in the recording and projecting of moving images, and the standard techniques of editing employed in narrative fiction film, function in the service of ideological interpellation.

Whatever one's opinion of the cogency of neo-Freudian and neo-Marxist film theory qua theory, one is obliged to recognize the social, cultural, and political value that has accrued as a consequence of the articulation, development, and application of these theoretical constructs. We—and I mean, not just academics and intellectuals, but broad swaths of the general public—are aware now, in ways and to an extent that would have been hard to imagine in an earlier epoch, of the self-replicating energies latent in many cultural formations and of the ways cultural artifacts can serve the interests of the cultural/political status quo. The kind of general skepticism bred by the hermeneutics of suspicion has proved to be profoundly useful.

And yet the idea that narrative fiction film functions as a monolithic apparatus oriented exclusively toward ideological indoctrination, the perpetuation of the status quo, has always been felt, within the field of film studies, to be somewhat problematic—at odds both with the interests and affective commitments that draw people to film studies as a profession and with most film scholars' experiences of and with narrative fiction film. Even during the period when ideology critique most dominated the field, for example, exceptions were made for particular films or particular types of film or the films of particular directors. Movies as various as *Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du jeu*, 1939), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), and *The Dark Knight* (2008) have all been seen, not as replicating or reinscribing, but as challenging prevailing ideological positions.[12] Films directed by women and minorities, or by artists associated with third or fourth cinema—even though the films necessarily employ the same equipment used by white, male, western filmmakers, and even when the films deploy conventional editing techniques—regularly get presented as offering critical commentary of varying sorts. Briefs have been made for the critical political value of melodrama, film noir, and horror. The tensions in film studies between needing, on the one hand, to acknowledge the pertinence of Althusserian and Lacanian inflected ideology critique, and wanting, on the other hand,

to recognize both the limitations inherent in that critique and the value and interest of film culture and individual films gets epitomized early on in the advent of what has come to be thought of as Grand Theory, in a couple of issues of *Cahiers du Cinéma* from the late 1960s, where, in a tortuous and somewhat tortured response to the challenges laid down by the hard-line Marxist journal *Cinéthique* (whose editors called for a "revolutionary" cinema produced outside standard channels of financing and distribution),[13] the editors at *Cahiers* struggle to find grounds for distinguishing progressive from reactionary film texts, and for ways to continue to engage mainstream Hollywood movies.[14]

Despite the centrality of a hermeutics of suspicion to the history of film studies, in other words, film scholars have consistently found ways to seek and see value in narrative fiction films and in the time spent watching them. One of the chief values the experience of attending fiction films provides, I have been arguing—in parallel with Nussbaum's and Felski's defenses of narrative fiction—is the access they afford to the felt experience of other worlds.

This claim on behalf of literary fiction is grounded in another, however: that literary fiction is uniquely able to render not only subjective experience (that it has, as Felski puts it, the "ability to read minds" [89]), but, as noted earlier, a sense of intersubjectivity. The novel is able to give us "not just an anthropology, but a phenomenology: a literary rendering of how worlds create selves, but also of how selves perceive and react to worlds made up of other selves" (91). This ability, she goes on to say, has important "philosophical and theoretical resonances" (91) having to do with the ways and the extent to which we can know other people, other times, other cultures.

But since fiction films are not as good as literary fictions at reading minds, it might be objected, they have a limited capacity to convey the kind of culturally specific phenomenology Felski concerns herself with. And, indeed, the objection possesses a certain surface plausibility—but only because the kind of third person omniscient narration that is common in literary fiction and that provides direct and unambiguous descriptions of characters' beliefs, thoughts, and feelings remains (Wes Anderson notwithstanding) relatively rare in film. As is well known, however, movies have, almost from the inception of the medium, found hosts of ways of giving viewers access to characters' minds, temperaments, and emotions. Felski's observation about the novel, that it "spins out endless

modulations on the theme of subjectivity" (26), is just as true of the narrative fiction film.

The most explicit (though not, I would say, the most immediate) form of access to subjective experience is, in fact, omniscient, third-person narration, which, while indeed rare, does sometimes make its way into movies. "The nearness of the clinging form," we are told in a modestly pornographic title card in *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918), "the warm touch of the first woman he had ever known thrilled Tarzan with a new emotion and every throbbing pulse-beat spurred him to take her for his own." "No lad who has liberty for the first time and twenty guineas in his pocket is very sad," intones the stuffy third-person narrator of Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975) near the outset of the film. "And Barry rode towards Dublin, thinking not so much of the kind mother left alone and of the home behind him, but of tomorrow and all the wonders it would bring." As in literature, too, characters reveal thoughts and feelings directly when they express them to other characters. "I don' know," Thelma says to Louise at one point during the course of their flight toward freedom (*Thelma & Louise*, 1991), "But somethin's, like, crossed over in me … and I can't go back. I mean, I just couldn't live." "I know," Louise replies. "I know what you mean." As do we.

Movies, in addition, afford an array of more medium-specific modes of access to subjective experience. And while all of these are well known and understood and have been amply discussed in other contexts, there is a value, it seems to me, in pausing here to appreciate the richness of film's capacity to render the felt experience of given lives. Voiceover—to start with the mode most related to the preceding, can, like dialogue, give viewers a sense of a character's own understanding of self and event: "I know there are women, like my best friends, who would've gotten out of there the minute their boyfriend gave them a gun to hide" Karen (Lorraine Bracco) tells us in voiceover in *Goodfellas* (1990) just after Henry (Ray Liotta) hands her the bloody pistol he has just used to beat a smug and villainous neighbor boy nearly to a pulp. "But I didn't," she continues. "I gotta admit the truth: it turned me on." And the film immediately cuts, in order to underscore the point, to the scene of her wedding to Henry. The odd, and oddly moving post-mortem voiceover that guides us through the narrative in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) serves as the film's most direct means of registering the peculiar brand of thwarted narcissism that failing screenwriter Joe Gillis (William Holden) turns into a persona.

Then, too, sound can be manipulated in hosts of ways to reflect individual perceptions and sensibilities and emotional or physical or psychic states: the growing paranoia Carol (Catherine Deneuve) experiences as she drifts toward delusion in the early stages of Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) registers as a heightened sensitivity to sound, which we, in a sense, experience with her, inasmuch as all the day-to-day noises that surround her in the apartment she shares with her sister—the dripping of a leaky faucet, the echo of voices coming up from the street, the opening of doors, the hum of a refrigerator—get played a couple of ticks too loudly on the soundtrack; the anxiety, guilt, and trauma weighing on Alice White (Anny Ondra) in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929) after she has stabbed the man who tried to rape her famously gets conveyed by the muffling of all the words in a woman's monologue about the murder except the word "knife," which gets louder with each repetition. The manipulation of sound has been used to give viewers a sense of the experience of intoxication (as when Harvey Keitel's Charlie in *Mean Streets* [1973], on the verge of passing out, wanders through a bar, the viewers perspective locked to his in a version of a SnorriCam shot, and all we hear on the sound track, despite seeing Charlie speak with other men in the bar, is the poundingly insistent doo-wop "Rubber Biscuit"); neurosis (as when Marion Crane [Janet Leigh], in *Psycho* [1960] plays out in her imagination conflictedly self-punishing and self-congratulatory scenarios depicting the discovery of her crime and the suspicions of those who interact with her during her flight); emotional, physical, and psychic shock (as in the muffling of sound that has, since *Saving Private Ryan* [1998], become a convention of the representation of battle); terror (the awful, horrifying silence of the breaking up of the International Space Station in *Gravity* [2013]); anticipation and deep pleasure (the distortions and intensifications of sound that accompany the cooking and consuming of heroin in Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* [2000]).

Finally, sound serves to convey a sense of subjective experience in film through music. It is not just that music can function to define a given character's temperament or general state of mind (the way, say, "The Sound of Silence" comes to define Benjamin Bradock in *The Graduate*; nor that it can underscore or communicate a particular mood (the way Flatt and Scruggs's raucous "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" helps viewers feel the joy Barrow gang members take, early on, from their outlaw life in Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* [1967]). Music can provide viewers with quite specific information about a given character's experience of a given

moment in time. There's a point, for example, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) when Scottie (James Stewart), having become fascinated by Madeleine (Kim Novak) and the melancholy, mad vulnerability she represents, accompanies her on a drive to Muir Woods. They stop for a moment by the side of the road next to the ocean. As Madeleine talks to Scottie about her fears, elements of the nervous, jagged madness theme in Bernard Hermann's score play softly underneath the conversation. Madeleine runs toward the ocean, Scottie of course following. As he catches her, embraces her, the waves suddenly crashing behind them, shooting foam into the air, the score shifts to the lush, swooning love theme, which reaches a crescendo just as they kiss. The music is beautiful, haunting, but overstated, melodramatic, too insistent. The scene produces a sort of paradoxical tension: it somehow manages to be moving while seeming a little silly. The score here, I want to say, is not just functioning to set or signal a mood—at least not in any conventional sense. What we're hearing, as well as seeing in the abrupt violence of the sea, is, to be sure, a kind of analog for what Scottie is feeling as he first acknowledges and expresses his love for Madeleine. The welling music, the churning ocean, represent the intensity and sudden insistence of his passion and desire. But it's important to recognize that the passion is being marked—by the overstated intensity of the music, by the melodramatic, clichéd image of waves crashing—as Scottie's alone. The music, that is, not only conveys his subjective experience but delimits it as his particularly, his peculiarly. We are not just hearing and seeing that Scottie is falling in love; we are hearing and seeing how. And we are being told, by both sound and image, that there is something slightly off, something slightly unbalanced in the way he is going about it.

Sound, of course, is but one component in film's capacity to convey subjective experience. Hitchcock can serve as a bridge here. Late in *Suspicion* (1941), Lina (Joan Fontaine) comes to suspect that Johnnie (Cary Grant), now her husband, plans to kill their friend Beaky (Nigel Bruce). She wakes to find that the two men have driven off to survey some coastal land they have considered developing. The coast is a wall of sheer cliffs, and when Lina arrives, she notices a set of tire tracks running right to the precipice. She stares down at the roiling ocean, the melodramatic score surges in waves like the water (the music and image here functioning in relation to Lina just as they do in relation to Scottie in the scene described above). Assuming the worst, Lina returns home. Just as she arrives at her front door, a shadow, presumably from a passing cloud,

engulfs the house. The film cuts to an interior shot of her entrance, Lina framed within a spider web of shadows that has become, by this point, a prominent motif, the soundtrack consisting solely of the eerie strains of her husband whistling a waltz, the one that played the first time the two danced together. Listening to it now causes Lina to cringe. As she follows the sound of the whistling to the couple's drawing room, the whole of the house remains shrouded in shadow. Suddenly Lina sees Beaky and understands that she has been mistaken; and as she moves forward to embrace Johnnie, the waltz now coming from a record player Beaky and Johnnie have been trying to fix (and playing at a volume too high for diegetic sound, so that it comes across as part of the score), the cloud suddenly lifts and the room is bathed in light.

Obviously enough, nature doesn't conform to people's emotional states—except in very bad art. And while the whole of Hitchcock's oeuvre does contain some gauche moments, this isn't one of them. What we are seeing is what Lina is feeling, the settling in, then the passing, of a sense of foreboding, of incipient terror.

This capacity of film to render subjective experience through cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, was understood very early on. The issue has been addressed by theory and has been taken up in analyses of individual films. Still, cinema's ability to give us a sense of what it might be like to see into the souls of other human beings, a sense of how it might feel to see *with* the souls of other human beings—to perceive the world through their eyes, hear the world through their ears, imagine the world with their minds—remains, I think, underappreciated. It's not just that we can be given access to transitory thoughts, feelings, and states of being. In movies we witness characters' dreams and fantasies, their delusions and hallucinations, their memories. Like literature, film even has the capacity to reveal what a given character is really feeling or thinking beneath or behind what he or she is expressly saying or doing—as when an inner version of Annie (Dianne Keaton) steps out of her body and walks away from her and Alvy's (Woody Allen) lovemaking in *Annie Hall* (1977).

That this sort of subjectivizing work in film can achieve remarkable depth and subtlety is a point that can, perhaps, be most effectively and efficiently made by simply citing obvious instances. By the end of *Wild Strawberries* , we have borne witness, not just to Isak Borg's (Victor Sjöström) memories and dreams, but to his fears and desires and regrets. We have seen both his generosity and his pettiness, his capacity for both love and cruelty. He is a character we come to know, as they say, in the

round—and in relation to others, whose attitudes toward Borg, also and always marked by complexities of their own, we also come to understand. We have as rich a sense of Guido (Marcello Mastroianni) by the end of Fellini's *8 ½* (1963), which offers—in its dream, fantasy, and memory sequences—a kind of catalog of subjective states that tell us not only what Guido thinks about, but *how* he thinks about such things as his relations with his wife and his mistress, his religious upbringing, his art, his public image, and his career. The film functions as a kind of existential x-ray. What dream and memory sequences do for *Wild Strawberries* and *8 ½*, musical numbers do for Lars von Triers's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), with whose protagonist, Selma Jezkova (Björk), the viewer gains a kind of aching intimacy. Björk's intensely lived and heartbreaking performance is, of course, a central factor in the creation of that intimacy—as is the Dogma 95-inflected cinematography, which, emphasizing close-ups, continually scrutinizes Selma's face, inviting the viewer to bear witness to the unfolding of Selma's experience. But the musical numbers provide a more direct access to Selma's subjectivity—her basic orientation toward the world, her feeling tone at a given moment and in a given context, the lyrics and the dramatically altered cinematography employed for the musical numbers (the camera mounted rather than hand-held, the use of cuts rather than pans, the muted color palate changing to lush saturation), serving to tell us and show us what Selma is thinking and how she is feeling. The first number, for example, takes place at the factory where Selma works pressing basins out of sheet metal. She is on her first night shift and is exhausted. As her attention drifts from the work she is doing to the sounds, the rhythms, of the factory, the mode and mood alter and the film moves to a musical interlude. The song—both in terms of lyrics and tone—directly represent Selma's vision of the world, her exuberance, her optimism, her sense of her friend Kathy (Catherine Deneuve), whom Selma sees as hiding her light under a basket. The world of the musical numbers is bright, upbeat, exciting—an inner world at odds with the surrounding reality. And in the tradition of the musical, the numbers are transformative: the factory floor, previously drab and depressing, becomes a kind of dance club; the industrial machines, which the viewer has come to associate with oppression and danger, become art.

Two related potential objections present themselves at this point. The first is that the kind of emphasis I am placing on subjective experience, that I see narrative fiction film as placing on subjective experience, is committed to, and attempts to reinforce or shore up, an outmoded, if not

reactionary, conception of a transcendental subject, and that the values underwriting the argument are values associated with bourgeois individualism: the sanctity, sovereignty, and unity of the self, the freedom of individual imagination, and so on. The second objection is that the sense these images of fictionalized subjectivities give us of our capacity to know others is not just illusory, not just presumptive, but unethical. By the lights of the camp in contemporary literary criticism and theory influenced by Levinas and associated with the ethical turn in literary studies, the specific value of literature derives from its capacity to stage encounters with alterity. Through the lens provided by this perspective, my insistent suggestion that we can share another's subjective experience would be seen as fostering a kind of intra-psychic—and often cross-cultural—appropriation, the assimilation of the different to the same. Particularly problematic would be something like the following: my believing that I (white, male, middle-aged, middle-class, American) have an intuitive grasp of the inner workings of a character like Jeanne Dielman (*Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, [1975])—an intuition I might express casually as "I know just what she's going through." What we should be looking for, in our engagement with narrative fiction (and the same would surely hold true for our engagement with fiction film), is—to put it in terms the philosophical texts have put into play—not knowledge but acknowledgment: according to the "new ethicists," as Dorothy J. Hale has called them, what gets staged in the reading of literary fiction (or film) are opportunities for confronting difference and acknowledging the other (as other).

By way of responding—undoubtedly, but necessarily, too briefly—to the latter objection first: while it is surely the case that in our dealings with the world acknowledgement takes precedence over knowledge, that we are obligated to others, as it were, immediately, prior to any knowledge we have of them, knowing and acknowledging are not mutually exclusive operations. Felski, referencing Stanley Cavell, whose work on acknowledgement bears most directly on the study of film, puts the point as follows: "the question of knowledge is deeply entangled in the practices of acknowledgement" (30). The kind of imbrication Felski points to here also gets underscored by Hale, whose essay aims at teasing out the connections between the work of Nussbaum, on the one hand, and, on the other, that of the new ethical critics of literature when she draws connections between what Nussbaum means by *love* and what the new ethicists mean by *acknowledgement*. The Nussbaum book serving as primary source, for Hale, of Nussbaum's thought is entitled, after all, *Love's Knowledge*.

In practice, while reading (either films or novels), we are constantly toggling between the familiar and the new, the known and the unknown.[15] Hale gets at just this kind of movement in her account of Judith Butler's discussion of the reader's relation to the protagonist of Henry James's *Washington Square*: "The reader's easy access to Catherine throughout *Washington Square* thus abruptly ends [at the end of the narrative] with her transmogrification from knowable point of view to unfathomable other" (319). But this movement, again on Hale's account of Butler's account of alterity, is just one stage in an ongoing circuit of exchange between text and reader, since "it is precisely Catherine's move beyond social binding that binds the reader to her" (319), a form of binding that effectively gives the reader Catherine's experience: "Being bound (to the enigma that is Catherine, to the ambiguity that ends James's novel), the reader 'has' (as James himself might say) her ethical experience" (320), and having that experience "frees us from our usual epistemological limits… Incomprehension of the other yields knowledge of the self" (320). Moving from the known to the unknown expands the terrain of the known, producing new knowledge. The interplay of likeness and difference, and the capacity of that interplay to produce self-understanding are continuous points of reference in Felski's discussion of what she refers to generally as *recognition*: "Literary texts offer us new ways of seeing, moments of heightened self-apprehension, alternate ways of what Proust calls reading the self" (48). The brunt of my argument in this chapter is simply that narrative fiction films tender the same sort of enlightenment.

As for the first potential objection noted above, the one concerning my emphasis on subjectivity depending on, and designed to endorse, the idea of the transcendental subject: all of the writers whose thinking I am most interested in pursuing and turning to my own purposes—Nussbaum, Felski, Butte, Cavell—focus not on subjectivity per se, but on the deep intersubjectivity referred to above—that is, subjectivities not only imbricated in other subjectivities but enmeshed in concretely defined socio-cultural and historical situations. That sense of the embeddedness of the subject is central to all their concerns. Felski and Butte, as I have been noting, are explicit on the point. Nussbaum, in her insistence on the "context-embeddedness" of the features relevant to right moral reasoning, consistently presents an image of the subject—in her discussion, say, of Maggie's and Adam's delicate negotiation, in James's *The Golden Bowl*, toward a kind of relinquishing of relation—as always already caught up, as constrained by, and constructed out of, entanglement with the other. The

same can be said for Cavell, much of whose work on film focuses precisely on relationality: pairs of subjectivities working out, or failing to work out, in concretely defined circumstances, the possibilities of forging community. If there are films and novels that image subjectivity as unencumbered by history, culture, and other subjectivities I don't know them.

I want now simply to argue that narrative fiction film is at least as good as literary fiction at doing the work of rendering matrixes of intertwined subjectivities—the felt experience of a determinate world. Unlike narrative fiction, which easily manages both first person and complete omniscience, fiction film's default mode has come to be—one wants to say, risking a certain determinism, out of necessity—a form of limited omniscience, which has the benefit of foregrounding the kind of perceptual interaction, the deep intersubjectivity, that Felski showcases. Our experience of that intersubjectivity—what Felski describes as a "seeing as" (86)—constitutes a form of knowledge acquisition; and such knowledge, as Nussbaum regularly insists, is really only conveyed discursively—can really only be conveyed discursively—through literary fiction, drama, and film. "[C]ertain truths," Nussbaum writes in the introduction to *Love's Knowledge*, "can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist" (5).

Almost any fiction film could supply examples of the kind of intersubjective interaction that is at issue here: indeed, such interaction is the warp and woof of narrative fiction film, and a central focus of the analyses of *Chinatown* and *Memento* in subsequent chapters. But just by way of illustration, here are two examples that have the benefit of being not only brief and pointed, but of carrying fairly obvious cultural weight.

Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) is a movie constructed out of cross-cultural and generational (and, to a lesser extent, gendered) confrontations. The film might well be described as simply a procession of such conflicted encounters—staged, so to speak, for our consideration. We are invited into them. One of the early ones concerns a (literal) run-in between a white guy (John Savage) recently moved into the black neighborhood the film is set in and Buggin Out (Giancarlo Esposito), one of its principal characters. The white guy, identified as Clifton in the credits but unnamed in the film, is returning home after a weekend bike ride (the action of the film unfolds during a—roughly—twenty-four hour period starting on a Saturday morning). Drinking from a carton of juice and rolling his bike beside him, Clifton bumps into Buggin Out, in the process scuffing with his bike's tire Buggin Out's new white Air Jordans. To make

any real sense of the conflict that ensues, we are effectively required to imagine it from the perspective—through the assumptions and attitudes, the shifting emotions—of each of the participants (Clifton, on the one hand; Buggin Out, flanked by The Gang of Four [Steve White, Martin Lawrence, Leonard L. Thomas, Christa Rivers], on the other), whose perspectives are conveyed by every means available to the filmmaker: not just dialogue, but performance (gesture, intonation, stance), composition, cinematography, lighting, costuming. Clifton feels beleaguered, attacked: he's outnumbered in the confrontation and the reactions of Buggin Out and his friends seem excessive, unwarranted. After all, he has apologized for scuffing the sneakers, an incident he clearly sees as trivial. His sense of being beset gets conveyed both by the acting, the palpable impatience and frustration Savage is able to register (over the course of the scene, Clifton is shot primarily in tight close up, his eyes darting among his interlocutors), and by the mise-en-scene: although all participants in the scene are initially standing on the same sidewalk, at the same level, Clifton is shot from above, and Buggin Out and the others from below, so that the black youth are made to seem to be looming menacingly over the increasingly wary white guy. When Buggin Out and the others question his right to be in the neighborhood, he grounds his sense of the legitimacy of his ownership of the brownstone, first in what he sees as his inalienable right of freedom of movement ("As I understand it, this is a free country: a man can live wherever he wants") and, second, in a sense of common space ("I was born in Brooklyn").

For Buggin Out and the Gang of Four, Clifton is an ambulatory emblem of white privilege. His presence in the neighborhood is an affront: "Who told you to buy a brownstone on my block in my neighborhood on my side of the street?" Buggin Out yells at one point. "Motherfuck gentrification." Clifton's appeal to freedoms and rights is similarly offensive: "Free country?" Buggin Out says. "Man, I should fuck you up for saying that stupid shit alone." Clifton doesn't understand, doesn't even try to understand, that he enjoys freedoms that Buggin Out doesn't and can't, a failure of imagination conveyed by the performance: "I'm out of here," he says dismissively, picking up his bike and climbing the steps of the brownstone. Finally, Clifton's wearing of a Larry Bird jersey, which prompts the call for him to go back to Massachusetts is, in context, a form of microaggression, given the cultural politics of basketball in the 1980s: like the Wall of Fame in Sal's Pizzeria, the jersey signals a refusal to recognize the concerns and sensibilities of the people living in the neighborhood. When

Clifton implies that he belongs there because he "was born in Brooklyn," Buggin Out and the Gang of Four scoff, throwing their hands up derisively: there is Brooklyn … and there is Brooklyn, Clifton's Brooklyn and theirs.

The tone of the scene is odd—but of a piece with that of the movie as a whole. On the one hand, it threatens to fall into didacticism, since it remains clear throughout that Buggin Out is in the right and Clifton in the wrong. On the other hand, elements of the scene—Buggin Out's name and disposition, the framing that works to register Clifton's sense of being embattled and thus aligns viewers with his perceptions of the experience—persistently work against the grain of the very points the scene seems designed to make. Like the film as a whole, the scene simultaneously stages and deconstructs a kind of allegory about race, insisting that in order really to appreciate the points it's making about systems of racial oppression we need to recognize the different worlds, the different conceptual fields, that the various characters inhabit. Paradoxical processes are thus put into motion: In some sense, the imaginative engagement (with the subject positions of both Clifton and Buggin Out) that is required of the viewer in order to make sense of the scene cuts against the grain of its seeming point—that different forms of experience create unbridgeable subjective gaps, which in turn produce conflicts. The viewer here functions, is made to function while interpreting the scene, as a transit across just the kinds of divides that the film sees as tragic (Image 6.2).

My second example is briefer, less explicit: The central character in Susan Streitfeld's *Female Perversions* (1996) is a lawyer and would-be judge named Eve. In the course of its unfolding, the film shares with us her dreams, her fantasies, and her memories (both true and false). So we come to know the character in detail—intimately, let us say. We understand her insecurities and anxieties, her aspirations and desires. We bear witness to her competitiveness and competency and sense of privilege, her narcissism, a kind of embattled, neurotic sense of entitlement. At one point, shot from a distance, we watch as she emerges from a coffee shop to return to her car, which is illegally parked. A motorcycle cop pulls up to ticket her. As this is happening, the film cuts to a shot of an older Latina standing on the street, selling street snacks from a shopping cart. And we realize that we are seeing the whole of the scene between Eve and the cop through the perspective of the silent Latina, who can't hear distinctly what is being said. We watch a kind of pantomime, hear a muffled, mostly unintelligible conversation. But even though we don't know the specifics about

Image 6.2 Clifton embattled

what Eve is telling the cop, and even though the Latina witness remains silent, just observing the scene, seemingly impassively, we have a strong sense of the interiority of both women: Eve's self-confidence, her capacity to perform; the Latina's clear sense of the fact that were she in Eve's position, she would never get out of receiving the ticket, which the cop ultimately puts away, waving Eve off with a warning. A whole social structure, and the distinct ways two individual women inhabit it, is conjured in about two minutes of film time.

My point here is that with narrative fiction film, we typically don't need to be told what characters are feeling and thinking. The films communicate that to us by other means (principally, of course, by performance, which only belatedly drew the attention it deserved in film studies). I would say that these features of filmed narrative "fill in" for the kind of omniscience narrative fiction can provide, but that formulation would suggest that film is trying to compensate for some sort of deficiency. In fact, film is just doing related work in medium-specific ways—ways that have, I would say, a unique value in being less explicit. That is, because much of the data we have to process in interpreting moments in movies is nonverbal, our understanding, while more immediate in temporal terms, since we are decoding behavior, making determinations, in a kind of

intuitive fashion as quickly as we would in real life, is less immediate in the other sense, since we are not being directly told what the characters are thinking or how we are meant to understand them. We make inferences based on our knowledge of the conventions of the form and our understanding—more or less refined—of the norms and permutations of human behavior. The forms of discernment we practice in watching and reading films are thus, if I can put it this way, more directly transferable to our everyday encounters than those we practice while reading literary narratives.

The representation of intersubjective experience is a feature of almost all narrative fiction films, even the seemingly simplest: Stan Laurel casts a sheepish glance at Oliver Hardy, whose impatience with Laurel is palpable; and an aspect of their relationship—how they conceive of one another, how they conceive of themselves relative to one another—opens up to us. But this sort of "rendering of how … selves perceive and react to worlds made up of other selves" (91), in Felski's formulation of the idea, is frequently, commonly, the subject of whole movies. That the technique can achieve the same kind of richness, complexity, and depth as is achieved in narrative fiction is a claim that the extended readings of *Chinatown* and *Memento* will, I hope, help to bear out. But consider, in this context, the kind of richness, complexity, and depth Stanley Cavell, say, has been able to tease from his attention to the intersubjective experiences represented in such seemingly straightforward films as *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) and *It Happened One Night*.

* * *

I want to return to the idea of interpretation as I have described it previously—that is, to the idea of reading films, of approaching movies as purposive structures designed to convey meanings. For I can imagine someone objecting, at this point, that the kinds of attention I have been bringing to bear in this chapter on moments in movies and on characters and their interactions doesn't entail reaching for meaning—not, at any rate, the kind of meaning produced by a reading. Such an extension of the idea of interpretation, so the objection might go, is undesirable—a distraction, as Bordwell, for example, would have it, from other more pressing concerns—or untenable, as George Wilson, in dialogue with Bordwell, has argued.[16] From a Levinasian perspective, to recite and re-site a potential objection referenced earlier, one might well want to argue that situating a

character within a reading constitutes a kind of violation of the otherness of the character, that fictional characters, like readers and viewers, have a right to their lives, have the right, more particularly, not to be pinned down in such ways.

Since this book as a whole is designed to serve as rejoinder to the claim that attention to interpretation has distracted film scholars from doing more rewarding work, I won't belabor a response here. All I do want to point out is that the kind of rhetorical analysis that Bordwell champions and the work of interpretation are not mutually exclusive. When the latter is done well, it inevitably includes and subsumes the former: good readings of movies always attend to local meanings, the value of gesture, the significance of narrative sequencing. As for Wilson's objections to conceiving of meaning in terms of "linguistic and speech act" models, and which he characterizes as "the dubious endeavor of discovering a constellation of 'messages' that the film supposedly asserted or implied" (226): the issues here, as Wilson acknowledges,[17] are both complicated and complex, so attempting to negotiate them in any detail would take me too far afield from the main concerns of the chapter. But I will make the following brief observations: first, because Wilson is less interested in debunking a view of interpretation that he doesn't like than in propounding one that he does, he spends no time identifying the problems he sees in conceiving of narrative meaning in propositional terms. Deploying Cleanth Brooks's term "the heresy of paraphrase," he assumes the existence of a kind of critical consensus "that works of art are not, on the whole, in the business of conveying, whether directly or indirectly, general themes or morals or messages" (225). No such consensus, it seems to me, exists—certainly not in the fields of literary or film studies; and scholars in both fields continue to pursue the propositional value of literary and film texts. Second, the question of whether interpretation stops where Wilson wants it to stop—with the puzzling out of "the activities of a character who seems psychologically inscrutable," or trying to account for "what appears to be a significant lacuna in the dramatic development," or pondering "the ethical implications of a situation the characters have faced" (231)—or whether interpretation extends to some consideration of what the film might be wanting to say by means of the psychological inscrutability it presents, or the narrative discontinuities it highlights, or the ethical dilemmas into which it immerses its characters, might profitably be thought of as a matter of stipulation, rather than a concern for theory: a determination, or choice, that is, of the kind of game we are playing. From such a perspective, the

costs of dismissing engagement with thematics seem to me considerable: not only would we be setting aside some of what I see as the best writing to have been done on movies (the early work of Robin Wood on Hitchcock, for example, as well as a good deal of the feminist film criticism that revolutionized film studies in the 70s and 80s); but we would be radically reducing the scope of our interest in certain features of narrative films—visual motifs, for example—that are a source of significant interest. Wilson, for example, following Bordwell's lead, writes dismissively about the teasing of meaning from the appearance in movies of "windows and mirrors," which "'prompt' some critics to the ascription of reflexive references in the movies that contain them" (233). Wilson continues: "I share Bordwell's opinion that most instances of this kind of putative self-referentiality are arbitrary and implausible" (233). Both are surely right, of course, that in some cases the move from windows and mirrors to the idea of self-reflection does seem willful. But sometimes the sheer insistence of the motif requires explanation; and it is exceedingly difficult to do that explaining without going into thematics. And, indeed, Wilson's own essays on individual films regularly place the analysis of motifs in the service of identifying the films' thematic concerns. At the outset of his essay on Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937), for instance, he notes the film's persistent references to the motif of vision: "Through the visuals and dialogue, we are repeatedly introduced to questions concerning sight and the failure to see, pictures and picturing, and the various senses of the word *vision*."[18] At the end of the essay, Wilson draws the following conclusion from his analysis of this material: "Lang's overall vision here seems one of despair. The sighted blind will find themselves a genuinely human situation only by chance if, indeed, they find themselves a place at all" (38). Wilson would perhaps take issue with the way I am framing what he has written, insisting that Lang's vision is immanent in the details of the narrative, a part of the rhetoric of the film. But it's not clear to me why we should refrain from thinking of that expressed vision in propositional terms: an idea the film communicates.[19]

As for the objection that placing a character within the framework of an interpretation constitutes a violation of the character: the forms of our engagement in this enterprise don't really concern our relations to the characters, whose knowability always has a kind of limit, but whose sensibilities and experiences we are invited to try to take on; our engagement in our efforts at interpretation concern a different kind of encounter, staged at a different level. Working with the intentionalist model of

meaning as earlier described,[20] and conceiving of the film text as expressing a kind of consciousness—attitudes, beliefs, values—we encounter the film itself as other. But here the encounter is less a negotiation between knowing and acknowledging, between, that is, immersing oneself in another's experience and bumping up against the unaccountable strangeness of that experience, than it is a kind of conversation or discussion, one's aim being to understand the argument the other is making.

When we are working on a reading of a film, that is, the focus of our interest is not really who the characters are and what they are doing, but, first, how we are being prompted or prodded to feel about—to understand—who they are and what they do, and, second, why understanding them in the particular light given might matter.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate what I am getting at is simply to observe that identical, or very similar, characters and events activate very different responses in different movies. The characters are the same. Their actions are comparable. But they are framed differently for our understanding by the context of the film in which they appear. They are, to put it more pointedly, made to mean. Take, just by way of example, a handful of dull but decent film husbands or boyfriends, all appearing in movies made in the same place at roughly the same time: although they are defined in varying degrees of concreteness and specificity Joe Starrett (Van Heflin) in George Stevens's *Shane* (1953), Jim (Richard Webb) in Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947), and Jerry D'Amato (Paul Douglas) in Fritz Lang's *Clash by Night* (1952) are characterologically similar enough to warrant comparison. All get defined in dichotomous terms, with related positive and negative traits. They all, on the one hand, have a clear sense of right and wrong and try to act, by their lights, morally: they are "nice" guys. Each genuinely loves the woman with whom he is involved. None lacks courage. All show at least some capacity for self-restraint: that is, all are given opportunities to succumb to baser passions and yet hold back or catch themselves up. On the other hand, all three men are conventional to a fault, staid (by comparison with the male characters for whom they serve as foils), unimaginative, domesticated, and boring. They have no sense of adventure and no real awareness of life's depths.

Given that these three men are effectively analogues, permutations of the same character, it might seem, at first blush, that we would be justified in responding to each in the same way. But that is not how things play. The general contexts in which the characters are situated—that is, the films taken as wholes—and the concrete particularities of performance and

composition work to shift, as we move from one film to another, the relative balance being negotiated between the two basic terms by which the characters are defined. *Shane* draws our attention to Joe's dullness in a number of ways—mostly by contrasting him so starkly with the flashy Shane (Alan Ladd), who shows up to the Starrett farm sporting a suit of fringed white deerskin, a pearl-handled revolver, and a belt with a number of silver buckles, but also by foregrounding the general bovinity of Joe's bearing and behavior: he is big and stubborn and slow-moving; he uses his head as a battering ram in a fight (it helps that there's a bull-like quality to Van Heflin's features); and at one point he even admits to his wife Marian (Jean Arthur) that he knows he is "kinda slow sometimes." But the liminal self-awareness that the admission suggests makes clear that Joe is not, in fact, stupid. And his immediate follow-up to the admission is "but I see things." He knows his wife has strong feelings for Shane and doesn't begrudge her her desires or blame Shane for inciting them. Although Joe has his limitations, we come to respect him and to see the merit in the values he represents, values the film wants us (I would say) to think about.

Jim, in *Out of the Past*, is less fully fleshed out than Joe but he has similar strengths and weaknesses; and, like Joe, he understands that the woman he loves, Ann (Virginia Huston), loves someone else. There is even a moment in the movie when Jim, like Joe, seems to acknowledge his own limits; but the acknowledgement is really only seeming, since it rapidly shifts from being an observation about himself to being a passing of judgment on his rival, Jeff Markham (Robert Mitchum). "I don't know whether I'm good enough for [Ann]," he says to Jeff during a brief confrontation near the end of the movie, "but I know you aren't." The line hints at an undercurrent of narcissism and aggressiveness that make him, even in the general context of his good-guyness and respectability, seem puritanical and overbearing. Unlike *Shane*, that is, *Out of the Past* puts the bulk of the weight, not on the decency of the character, but on his dullness and conventionality, which finally come across as oppressive. There are good reasons why Ann loves Jeff and not Jim: the suggestion, at the conclusion of the film that Jim and Ann will end up together borders on the tragic. Here the dull but decent man serves, not to affirm the value of ordinary domestic life, as is the case in *Shane*, but to insist on the impossibility—grounded partly in the particular terms on offer in the culture, partly in the terms of existence—of ever achieving fulfillment.

The portrait of Jerry in *Clash by Night*, the third figure in this prosaic triumvirate, provides a useful point of departure for a consideration of one

of the central functions and values of reading films for meaning, since having a sense of what a film is trying, broadly, to communicate functions as tool for settling local, that is rhetorical, interpretive difficulties. Jerry is a generous, predispositionally gentle, tamed bear of a man. But he lacks imagination, insight, and psychological depth—a point made explicit in an early conversation he has with the world-weary Mae (Barbara Stanwyck). "People have funny things swimming around inside of them," she says to him early on in their relation. "Don't you ever wonder what they are?" To which, Jerry, dumb-lugishly, replies, "Maybe. Once in a while. But I don't like to think about things like that." At the end of the movie, after Mae has had a protracted affair with the brutish, brooding, volatile Earl (Robert Ryan), she returns to Jerry and, in a briefly sketched scene that closes the action, the two reconcile, commit themselves to trying again. On the surface, the conclusion is upbeat (if not exactly happy), conventionally ameliorative. And it is possible to argue, as Tom Gunning does in his brief comments on the film, that *Clash by Night* ends on a redemptive note: "the film's happy ending reconciliation is carefully crafted by [screenwriter Alfred] Hayes to seem the result of mature people realising their responsibilities and deciding to tolerate each other's failings."[21] But the suddenness of the shift in both Jerry's attitude and Mae's (his sudden willingness to forgive her; her sudden impulse to set aside her desire for Earl), as well as the brevity of the scene, serves as grounds for skepticism. After all, we have seen Mae and Jerry try to negotiate the distance between them before. It was clear then that Jerry had no real idea what he was getting into, even though Mae had insisted initially that it wouldn't work out between them, that the two were fundamentally incompatible. And it was clear as well that Mae had had to lie to herself, to suppress some element of her awareness of her own desires and of Jerry's limitations, in order to convince herself to go through with the marriage.

Perhaps we are meant to think that Jerry grows psychologically and morally over the course of the narrative. Perhaps by the end he has gained the kind of insight into life's complexities and depths that he had initially lacked. It is surely the case that he has been forced to witness and endure the effects of the "funny things swimming around" in Mae and Earl. But is he any closer to understanding these kinds of wellsprings of human interaction or to recognizing the animal nature buried in himself? Early in the movie, Jerry testifies that violence makes him physically ill. After learning of the affair between Mae and Earl, he comes perilously close to killing the latter. But does Jerry come to own his capacity for violence, to accept

it as a fundamental part of himself? The film leaves plenty of room for doubt.

Resolving the questions that hover around the conclusion of *Clash by Night* turn, not just on our understanding of the characters, but on our placing such understanding in the context of the film's depiction of women's and men's lives, of men's and women's relations, and of the relation between desire and domesticity as both, in turn, relate to men's and women's stations within the world of the film. Resolving these questions, that is, turns on having a sense of what the film has to say about all these matters. And on these grounds the conclusion of the movie reads less as redemptive and more as an indication of the impossibility for women—given the particulars of the culture as it is conceived for us—in coordinating a desire for agency and standing, on the one hand, and a desire for community (in the Cavellian sense) and stability, on the other. The climactic scene of the movie, where Mae confesses to Jerry that she and Earl have been having an affair, takes place in Jerry's and Mae's kitchen (arguably the most domestic of spaces). All three principals are present, with Mae in the background, face forward, at the high point of a triangle constructed from the three bodies, Jerry and Earl standing on either side of Mae, their backs to the camera. The two men are the poles between which Mae finds herself pinioned: on the one side, bland domesticity, safe, stupid, and unappealing; on the other, violent passion, complicated, compelling, and destructive. Imagistically, Mae here is presented as trapped. She remains so, it seems to me, at the end of the movie. To say that the film thus comments on the limits of women's lives within patriarchy—to frame the issue in terms of a proposition—is simply to tease out a basic implication of the interconnected working of narrative elements (Image 6.3).

The value of doing this kind of interpretive work—that is, grounding character analysis in what the film depicting the character is trying to say—is that it forces us to consider traits of character from a range of perspectives. It requires us, that is, to open up to a kind of dialog, to take into account an other's way of seeing. It requires negotiation with the text, which itself entails negotiating with the self, with our own patterns of response, our own habits of evaluation and understanding. For any given film text may well present us with ways of looking at or thinking about the characters and events depicted that initially seem utterly alien or unacceptable or untenable. That is, we might be asked to consider values and attitudes very different from our own and thus difficult to accommodate. Consider, for example, Hitchcock's fascination with charismatic

Image 6.3 Mae trapped

psychopaths: real life habits of character assessment both do and do not apply in responding to a character like Bruno Antony (Robert Walker) in *Strangers on a Train* (1951)—just to take one example of the many compelling psychopaths in Hitchcock's oeuvre. We do, of course, read Bruno the way we read people in our lives. It is not particularly difficult to characterize or place him: he is loud, gregarious, show-offish, narcissistic, and self-indulgent; he enjoys the stimulation that comes from adventure, lacks self-discipline, and would, like Philip Marlowe, "test high on insubordination."[22] But really to appreciate what Bruno is doing in the movie, how his presence serves the film, we have, first, to let ourselves really appreciate him, to enjoy his bravado and sense of humor and unconventionality. And, second, we have to let that capacity for appreciating Bruno guide us toward understanding him as a form of critical commentary on the hypocrisies and evasions that mark much conventional moral behavior and response (as imaged in the film by a guy named Guy). It's not that we are led by the film to see bad *as* good; but we are led to see the bad *in* good. And that process is potentially broadening.

* * *

By way of bringing an end to this brief for interpretation and for the value of the filmic, let me summarize just two points. First, a central value of the work of interpretation, as I see it, is that it fosters in viewers a kind of attentiveness to detail that is anything but habitual. Making sense of a movie, I tell my students, is a multi-stage process that begins in observation—the cultivated habit of noticing things while at the same time noticing what one is noticing, a form of self-reflective awareness. While this is a skill that is relatively easy to inculcate, it is not one that students entering an introduction to film studies class—that viewers generally—typically possess, in part because noticing things is difficult if one lacks a conceptual framework for understanding and a vocabulary for describing what one is seeing. To take just one instance: all of my students—anyone and everyone, really—will have been exposed to examples of racked focus. At some point or other—during a horror film, say, when the image of the protagonist in the foreground suddenly blurs to reveal the monster lurking just behind her—they will have been made to feel one of the possible effects produced by the technique. But in a meaningful sense, they won't have seen the shift in focus; they won't have really observed it; they will only have experienced it. Thus, they won't be in a position to see how it ties into narratological and/or thematic concerns. Specific context is always determinative, of course, but the technique of racking focus is often associated with sudden insight, a rushed epiphanic knowledge, either on the part of the viewer or a character or characters in the film. In horror movies, such gestures tend to feed into a generalized dramatic irony that might be read, in any given case, in different ways: as commentary, for example, on the basic precariousness of human experience, or on the value—or perhaps the futility—of vigilance. In the circumstances occasioned by other genres (a thriller, a police procedural, a detective film), a pattern of racked focus might signal the perceptiveness—or alternatively the obtuseness—of one of the players. Earlier in this book, during the course of a discussion of Mike Nichols's *The Graduate*, I briefly discussed a moment where a rack focus gets used, first, to indicate Elaine's changed understanding of the circumstances surrounding Ben's affair with a married woman—her realization that her mother was in fact the married woman involved—and, second, quickly and efficiently to move us from the drama playing out within Elaine to the drama of her mother's abjection. Lacking the vocabulary and conceptual framework that allow us to attend to what we are seeing, we will have trouble seeing the connection between the technique and the issues of blindness and insight concerned in the scene and the film

as a whole. We just won't see. And what we won't see is that the scene, and the film as a whole, are interested in seeing as an issue—more particularly they are interested in seeing what is just, for a moment, out of focus or, more broadly, just off center, off to the side.

Second, I see the work of interpretation as having the capacity to produce what both Nussbaum and Felski, in their discussions of engagement with literary texts, refer to as "knowledge"—in Nussbaum's more particular formulation, "love's knowledge," the kind of knowing that comes from a distinct way of orienting oneself toward oneself and others: a habit of self-scrutiny; an eagerness to expand the boundaries of one's own (necessarily limited) experience and to imagine and engage other ways of being in the world; a recognition of the built in limitations to such imaginative experiments; a sense of the importance, to matters of judgment, of accounting for what Nussbaum refers to as the "complex particularities" of specific contexts. The established discipline of reading films for meaning will not necessarily make viewers better people—by which I mean, echoing Nussbaum's echoing of Henry James, people who are "finely aware and richly responsible"[23]—but, I believe, it has the capacity to do so.

Notes

1. Gérard Leblanc, "Direction," *Cinéthique* 5 (Septembre/Octobre 1969), translated and reprinted in *Screen* 12.2 (1971), 121–31. The quote is from the *Screen* translation, 128.
2. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London, Routledge: 1992), p. 128.
3. Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), p. 1, hereafter cited in text.
4. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), p. 5, hereafter cited in text.
5. It is worth noting that Butte's work on intersubjectivity deals extensively with film. In addition to the text that Felski cites, *I Know that You Know I Know: Narrating Subjects from Moll Flanders to Marnie* (Columbus: Ohio UP, 2004), see, e.g., his "Suture and the Narration of Subjectivity in Film," *Poetics Today* 29.2 (2008), 277–308.
6. These principles—or as Nussbaum frames the issue, these features of a view of ethics—are discussed most directly in the "Introduction" of *Love's Knowledge* (see esp. pp. 35–44) but the ideas she lays out there undergird much of what she has to say on the subject. They are ideas she returns to repeatedly.

7. David Sterritt, "A Master of 'Austere' Films," *Christian Science Moniter*, Jan. 22, 1999. Found at http://0-web.a.ebscohost.com.library.lemoyne.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=4&sid=62624aa8-40da-4557-8a1a-69dba61d5da0%40sessionmgr4006&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1462429&db=afh.
8. André Bazin, *What Is Cinema: Volume I*, sel. and tr. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967), p. 14.
9. The idea that there is some fundamental connection between cinema and the real—that the real inheres in the image, that the cinematic image depends on the real (metaphors vary)—resonates well beyond the initial formulation by people like Bazin. In *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*, Andrew Klevan draws together the work of both David Thomson and Stanley Cavell, to show how grounded in actuality—actual bodies in actual places—film performance is. The citation from Thomson concludes with the following claim: "'Actor' is not even a term appropriate to the cinema. The barrier of the screen certainly gives the impression of acting, but what we are seeing in cinema are people." Here's how the citation from Cavell begins: "First, movie performers cannot project, but are projected. Second, photographs are of the world." While Klevan eschews an "unmediated realism" (4), he himself stresses this connection between representation and reality throughout the "Introduction": "A living human being," he insists, "embodies a film character" (7). The Thomson and Cavell quotes can be found in *Film Performance*, p. 3. The quote from Thomson is from *Movie Man* (Stein and Day: New York, 1967), p. 123. The quote from Cavell is from *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film (enlarged edtion)* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1979), p. 37, hereafter cited in text.

   Obviously enough, none of this discussion of the relation between photography/film and the real has any bearing on computer generated imagery.
10. This play of presence and absence in the photographed image also continues to be a point of interest well after the initial articulation of the idea. Here is one of Cavell's formulations: "objects participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearance. Objects projected on a screen are inherently reflexive, they occur as self-referntial, reflecting upon their physical origins. Their presence refers to their absence, their location in another place" (xvi). And here is James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), p. 30: "Thus every filmed performance partakes of what John Ellis and other theorists have described as the 'photo effect'—a teasing sense of presence and absence, preservation and loss."

11. And, yes, I understand that the house isn't a "real" house. It's materials have been made for manipulation. That doesn't gainsay the point.
12. On *Rules of the Game* as progressive political commentary, see, e.g.: Christopher Faulkner, "An Ideology of Politics: *Le Crime de M. Lange, La Vie Est à Nous, La Grande Illusion, La Règle du Jeu*," in *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* (Princeton UP, 1986), pp. 58–122, esp. 108–22; and Stephen Tift, "Drôle de Guerre: Renoir, Farce, and the Fall of France," *Representations* 38 (Spring 1992), 131–65. For *Full Metal Jacket* see, e.g.: Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, "Full-Metal-Jacketing or Masculinity in the Making," *Cinema Journal* 33.2 (Winter, 1994), 5–21; and Michael Pursell, "*Full Metal Jacket*: The Unraveling of Patriarchy," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 16.4 (1988), 218–25. For *The Dark Knight*, see, e.g.: See Todd McGowan, "The Exceptional Darkness of *The Dark Knight*," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/darkKnightKant/index.html.
13. See Leblanc, "Direction."
14. See Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinéma/Idéologie/Critique I," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 216 (October 1969), 11–16 and "Cinéma/Idéologie/Critique II," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 217 (November 1969), 7–13; translated and reprinted (under the names Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul Narboni) in *Screen* 12.1 (1971), 27–36: Of particular interest for my purposes are the films that belong to category five in the *Cahiers* typology, "films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner" (32). This category includes, of course, the kinds of Hollywood movies that had been a central focus of earlier *Cahiers* criticism, many of "which," the editors argue, "while being completely integrated in the system and the ideology end up by partially dismantling the system from within" (33).
15. For an interesting gloss on the way the works of Emanuel Levinas, Alain Badiou, and Jacques Derrida negotiate the (necessary) negotiation between sameness and difference involved in encounters with others, see Zahi Zalloua, *Reading Unruly: Interpretation and Its Ethical Demands* (U of Nebraska P, 2014), pp. 6–11. Adam Zachary Newton, in *Narrative Ethics* (Harvard UP, 2009), voices one version of the idea I'm getting at here when he notes that "the very fact of alterity obliges a constant interplay across the borders of self and other, each held mutually hostage by a constant exchange of surpluses of meaning accessible only from outside" (48).
16. See George M. Wilson, "On Film Narrative and Narrative Meaning," *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford UP, 1997), pp. 221–38, hereafter cited in text.

17. See Wilson, "On Film Narrative and Narrative Meaning," p. 225: "the issues associated with these debates [about interpretation] are delicate and hard to describe incisively."
18. George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), p. 17, hereafter cited in text.
19. All of Wilson's analyses of individual films, which, by the way, seem to me engaging and exemplary and which I would want to call readings, make similar statements about thematic meanings. Here he is on *North by Northwest* (1959): "*North by Northwest* presents us with a kind of wry apologia for the sort of illusionistic art—more specifically, for the sort of illusionistic cinema—that Hitchcock, paradigmatically, has always practiced" (64).
20. See "Introduction," n. 5.
21. Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: BFI, 2000), p. 393.
22. Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (New York: Vintage, 1988), p. 10.
23. The phrase comes from Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima*. Nussbaum quotes it in *Love's Knowledge*, p. 84.

PART II

Watching the Detective: Readings

CHAPTER 7

The *Chinatown* Syndrome

Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974)—unlike the movies discussed in Chaps. 2, 3, and 4 (and, indeed, unlike most fiction films, as I have been trying to suggest)—has generated a good deal of critical analysis, much of it interpretive in nature. Why then, one might well wonder, would I bother with it here? Wouldn't the time be better spent shining a light in one of the many dark corners of film studies? My aim in this chapter, and in Chap. 8, where I also take up consideration of a film that has been often analyzed, is to try to demonstrate the value that accrues when commentary on a film text reaches sufficient critical mass that certain basic concerns can be assumed to be settled and interpretation can turn to finer points. That is, I want to illustrate the value of the dialectical processes put into motion when critics have the opportunity to respond to one another over time. The richness and complexity of the analysis have, in those circumstances, a chance to build. What I have to say about *Chinatown*, in other words, has as much to do with my sense of the body of criticism that has built up around the movie as it has to do with the movie itself.

Principal among the issues that criticism of the film has mainly settled is the question of our basic understanding of the film's lead characters. Although some disagreement remains, that is, about whether Jake Gittes's (Jack Nicholson) problem is naivete or world-weariness, a solid consensus has formed at this point that Jake *has* a problem, or is one, that he has flaws the film wants us to see: despite the subjective focus, the action's being presented almost exclusively through Jake's perspective, we retain a

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_7

critical distance. As Vernon Shetley succinctly puts it, "[I]f the film confines us to Jake's point of view, it constantly reminds us of the limitations of that viewpoint."[1] Over the course of years since the film's release, Jake has been described, variously, as "inept" and "tragically impotent,"[2] as "hotheaded, venal, crude," and "bumptious,"[3] as a "fastidious showoff" and "braggart" with a "nervous, unsteady self image."[4]

As for Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway): initially, there was some sense, particularly in contemporary reviews, that she simply reprises the role of the femme fatale. Richard T. Jameson, for example, in a discussion of film noir for *Film Comment*, describes her as an "incarnation of the eminently untrustworthy, irresistibly alluring *film noir* female."[5] More recently, James Maxfield, questioning her "sexual morality," insists upon her essential unknowability.[6] But the sort of skepticism voiced here concerning Evelyn never really rises above a murmur; and she's now largely seen for what she is, a not uncomplicated, but surely sympathetic, victim—first of her father, then of Jake, and ultimately of patriarchy.

Most critics also recognize that Polanski's film works hard to draw connections between Evelyn and Chinatown.[7] Diegetically, this association primarily comes in the form of a homology Jake constructs between the two at the level of the symbolic. Extra-diegetically, the connection between Evelyn and Chinatown gets established primarily by the way the film enhances and emphasizes the vaguely Asian cast to Faye Dunaway's looks, secondarily by means of pointed juxtapositions. Pretty regularly, that is, when Evelyn is in frame, so too is one (or more) of her Chinese servants: she is effectively surrounded by a ghostlike Asian presence.[8] And she enters the film in the context of its first reference to matters Chinese, Jake's continuation and conclusion of the barber's joke about a guy who decides to "screw like a Chinaman." In this first appearance, *she* is the backdrop, the quiet commentary.

I'm rehearsing this material for two reasons. First, I want to elaborate a bit on these insights, which seem to me valuable, and to explore some implications that haven't been fully appreciated: the value, again, of dialectic. As I've said, most of the commentary on Jake as problematic—and this holds true as well for the discussion of Evelyn as better than she appears—is designed as evidence to support the claim that *Chinatown* functions as an assault on the private-eye film. The genre revisionism is either taken at face value or presented as a sign of the cynical times—a reflection of a disillusioned, post-Vietnam-War, post-Watergate-scandal American sensibility. R. Barton Palmer, in one of the handful of analyses of *Chinatown*

published a year or two after its release, makes this point most directly: Palmer explains the film's popularity, with the general public and the critics alike, by locating it "in the deep distrust of the problem solving abilities of reason and logic which is the legacy of the painful and mysterious failure in Vietnam and our frustrating incapacity to deal with social problems at home… a distrust which has been further intensified by the pervasive corruption of Watergate, an episode whose evils could be catalogued but whose ultimate causes could scarcely be identified." Gittes, Palmer goes on to argue, "exemplifies our doubts about the usefulness of knowledge, the healing powers of goodness, the efficacy of individual effort."[9]

This sense that *Chinatown* effectively distills a cynical 70s zeitgeist then becomes the basis for yet another consensus reading of the movie: that *Chinatown* itself either espouses or instills a sort of cynicism—that it is despairing, if not defeatist, perhaps nihilistic. Most of the commentary focuses on the film's grim concluding scene. "Polanski's ending," Michael Eaton argues for example, "retrospectively imbues the whole film with a protective despair which seems to assert that the protagonist's project is not only doomed but laughably naïve. Social ills cannot be rectified. Salvation is an illusion. Redemption? Forget it."[10] John Belton sounds a similar note: "*Chinatown*'s downbeat conclusion has its roots in the nihilistic resolutions of 1940s *films noirs*.… It does not conclude with the triumph of the heroic detective and the forces of reason.… It ends instead with a sense of bewilderment, alienation, and despair; with an assertion that individual action is either unable to effect change or counterproductive" (947–48). Thomas Leitch flatly calls *Chinatown* "an exceptionally bleak film, a record of unrelieved failure" (202).[11] Such negativism was in fact presented early on as a pointedly *political* failing by a number of critics, who dismissed the film as either apolitical or defeatist or both.[12]

The principal aim of the present essay is to argue that on *this* score, the question of the film's tone, the consensus has it wrong. Far from being cynical, *Chinatown* actually functions as a critique of cynicism, which it presents as a form of disappointed idealism and just as naïve. It prosecutes this position by means of its attack on Jake, whom it portrays as endlessly shuttling between these two equally simplistic, equally unsatisfactory poles. Nor is the film either despairing or hopeless, although the world it depicts is plagued by violence, exploitation, and corruption and its conclusion is surely sad. But precisely because that conclusion is given, not as an inevitability, but as the consequence of decisions made and actions taken by Jake, *Chinatown doesn't* bottom out in hopelessness. At the end of the

movie, Jake clearly gives up or gives in to an impulse toward nihilism. But he's a negative example, and we need to be careful to distinguish the film's view of the world from that of its protagonist. Indeed, by looking at him *as* a negative example, we can see that *Chinatown* does offer, not quite a solution, but a response to the problems it presents. Moreover, because the response it offers has some bearing on the way people relate to one another—because it concerns the way men, say, relate to women, or the way a dominant culture relates to a minority culture—*Chinatown*'s point, if you will, has a political dimension.

This comment concerning the politics of Polanski's movie brings me to the second reason I wanted, above, to summarize the critical consensus on Jake and Evelyn—and that is to point toward two peculiarities that mark the body of work done on the film: first, everyone sees *Chinatown* as effectively endorsing the world-view of a character whose view of the world it systematically critiques. Second, the sophisticated understanding of the main characters that has developed over the years has never been adequately brought to bear on the text's use of the Chinatown motif—the central element, aside from the movie's tone, that the criticism has tended to misconstrue. Despite the clear perception that Jake misreads Evelyn, who is associated with the Asian culture evoked by the film and who is portrayed sympathetically, and despite the knowledge that Jake's world view is suspect, criticism on the film largely accepts Jake's sense of what Chinatown means.

Most importantly what the criticism borrows from Jake is the assumption that Chinatown *has* a meaning, that it's not just a place but an idea. That Jake sees it as metaphoric space is made clear in every freighted reference:

Evelyn: Did you wear a uniform?
Jake: Sometimes.
Evelyn: Must've looked cute in blue.
Jake: Gimme a break will ya.
Evelyn: I don't know you. I want to know more about you.
Jake: Not now.
Evelyn: You really don't like to talk about the past, do you?
Jake: I'm tired.
Evelyn: Why does it bother you to talk about it?
Jake: It bothers everybody that works there.
Evelyn: Where?

Jake: Chinatown. Everybody. To me, it was just bad luck.
Evelyn: Why?
Jake: You can't always tell what's going on—like with you.
Evelyn: Why was it bad luck?
Jake: I was trying to keep someone from being hurt, and I ended up making sure that she was hurt.

In some measure, the slippage that occurs in Jake's part of the conversation from a time (the past) to a place (Chinatown) is justified by Evelyn's question about the uniform: the last place Jake wore one was in Chinatown. But it also makes clear the extent to which, for Jake, Chinatown functions as figure. His assumption that Evelyn knows what he's talking about when he refers to an unnamed "there" shows how vast and important a metaphoric space Chinatown is for Jake. And as even this brief exchange makes clear, it has for him a range of associations. Most directly, of course, it refers here to the past—and to the trauma he experienced "there." But as his description of his experience and his comment about bad luck suggest, Chinatown also stands for a sort of fatedness, as well as something we might term existential discomfort, which he generalizes in his remark that "it [a pronoun with no clear referent] bothers everybody that works there … everybody." When Jake compares Evelyn and Chinatown, he points to yet another meaning: like Evelyn, this space represents for Jake an intriguing, but potentially dangerous, ambiguity.

That Jake also sees Chinatown as signifying the essential pointlessness of human endeavor is hammered home in the film's concluding moments. The scene is familiar enough, part of the fabric of American popular culture. Jake stares forlornly at Evelyn's body. Her head rests on the seatback of the pale yellow Packard convertible she had hoped to escape in; the bloody, black crater that now appears where her eye should be aims pointlessly at the night sky. Quietly, flatly, to no one in particular, Jake mumbles "As little as possible." That, Jake told Evelyn a few hours earlier, is what he and his old partner Escobar (Perry Lopez) and the other cops like them assigned to Chinatown used to *do* on their beat—the implications being, first, that nothing happening in Chinatown really matters to outsiders and, second, that, given their ignorance of the culture they are supposed to be policing, it is better for the cops to do nothing than to risk, by means of some unanticipatable blunder, producing catastrophe. Something like this cynicism, surely, is what Jake takes from his current experience with Evelyn. Her death reconfirms for him his belief that tragedy is unavoidable

and the triumph of evil inevitable. There is, Jake clearly concludes, no real outside to Chinatown, because there is no way to keep from coming back; the principles that obtain there obtain everywhere. Thus one's only recourse is to steel oneself against the onslaught, to shut oneself down, to create some sort of buffer between oneself and the world, to withdraw, to do "as little as possible." By way of consolation, Walsh (Joe Mantell), one of Jake's "operatives," corroborates. "Forget it Jake," Walsh says with a kind of cynical, noir authority, "it's Chinatown." Then, Jake gets led away past the milling clot of Asian onlookers and the mournful score resumes (first strings, then piano, then plangent horns), the camera pulls up and back—to take in the atmosphere, the cityscape, the darkness and neon, the litter, the dispersing crowd, the cops going diligently about the business of moving the incident toward oblivion. His back to us, getting smaller on the screen, Jake shuffles shakenly away between Walsh and his other assistant, Duffy (Bruce Glover), broken, once again, we know, by guilt and grief, once again withdrawing into a safe cocoon of world-weary wariness as surely as he is retreating from view.

The critics, as I've said, take the lugubrious ending and Jake's and Walsh's insistence on seeing the sad events as somehow aligned with and symbolized by the place they happen to be standing as a warrant for reading Chinatown as Jake and Walsh do. "Chinatown," John Cawelti argues, "becomes a symbol of life's deeper moral enigmas, those unintended consequences of action that are past understanding and control" (232). This position, expressed consistently in contemporary reviews and academic considerations of the movie alike, borders on the universal.[13]

One problem that arises in relation to this reading of the film is that, if the reading is right, *Chinatown* is troubling in terms of its representation of race and gender. Concerning race, the problems are fairly obvious. Indeed the whole complex of issues can be located by merely referring to Edward Said's discussion of Orientalism. *Chinatown*: textbook example. The potential sexism surfaces in relation to the racism, since Evelyn, again, is associated with the Asian culture evoked by the film. If the movie uses Chinatown symbolically, it uses her symbolically too. If Chinatown is a metaphor for the enigmatic, for "corruption," for "darkness, strangeness, and catastrophe," so is she. We are left with two related sets of stereotypes: the inscrutable Oriental, whose world, if it is governed at all, is governed by rules too complicated for a Westerner to grasp; and the mysterious female, whose inner workings seem as lawless as the Orient. Both are

figures for unknowability, the Other, the outside of white, Western, male subjectivity.

The vast majority of critics who see Chinatown as symbolizing evil, or the limits of human understanding, or the checks life imposes on human striving, fail to acknowledge the racism involved in this kind of *use* of a culture. Nor do they recognize, let alone deal with, the problems such a conception of Chinatown poses for a reading of Evelyn as point of identification and figure of sympathy. Belton, for example, takes the familiar tack of insisting that "Chinatown is a place where corruption, the unnatural, and the irrational reign, where reason has no force" (948); and he predictably associates this space of unreason with Evelyn, who, he says "fill[s] in … for the absent place of Chinatown, which remains unseen until the last sequence in the film" (945). Thus, in the same essay, Belton describes Evelyn as both a "*femme fatale* … Polanski's lady from Shanghai" (945) *and* as one of the film's "innocents" (941), victim of a father, who "has placed her in the shadows of the Imaginary," where she is unable to articulate "the truth of her own feminine experience" (944).

The sop to Evelyn is made necessary not only by myriad details in the film that work to make her a sympathetic figure but also by the unstated understanding that seeing her as anything but sympathetic—seeing her, that is, as a real femme fatale, who is self-serving and duplicitous, and whose death is therefore in some sense deserved, the way, say, Kathie Moffat's (Jane Greer) death is presented as deserved in *Out of the Past* (1947), or as Phyllis Dietrichson's (Barbara Stanwyck) death is presented as deserved in *Double Indemnity* (1944)—entails conceding that the text poses such problems in terms of its representation of gender that it has to be dealt with primarily in those terms, a concession that would make the readings actually on offer less compelling, perhaps even irrelevant.

This kind of incoherence can be avoided by seeing Evelyn and Chinatown as linked in the film, not by what they are, or what they symbolize, but by how they are viewed—mainly, but not exclusively, by Jake, who clearly gets Evelyn wrong, and whose conception of Chinatown might therefore be misleading too. Evelyn and Chinatown are connected, in other words, but they are connected not by meaning, but by function, by what they show us about Jake. Maybe Chinatown is just a place—like any other. Maybe it's not bad luck at all—except for those who fail to read carefully.

Admittedly, such an interpretation *feels* wrong. All the adumbration Garrett Stewart so eloquently discusses—the "dumb sexual joke about

Chinamen," the continual cropping up of Chinese servants, the flaw in Evlyn's iris, the references to Jake's past (29)—seems so insistent. And the considerable pain the conclusion produces seems somehow lightened by the thought that, well, maybe nothing really matters. Indeed, in context, such nihilism is strangely gratifying. Then, of course, there's the title—which surely *means* something. What I want to suggest is that these aspects of tone—the feeling the film creates that events here are freighted with meaning, that they are overdetermined, along with the slightly paranoid sense that the characters' movements are governed from without, the sense of fatedness and anxiety—are aspects of the movie's, and perforce the audience's, alignment with Jake and his perspective.

That the movie and audience are so aligned seems fairly obvious. As Eaton explains at length, for example, we never know (on first viewing) much more or much less than Jake knows.[14] Our understanding of events is tied to his. We learn with him that the woman who first visits his office as Evelyn Mulwray is not in fact Mrs. Mulwray. And with him later on we learn that woman's real identity. We are, moreover, *always* with him: during the course of the film's two hours and eleven minutes of running time, there is no scene that does not include Jake. This is *his* story—in both senses. And as many critics have noted, the camera work throughout invites us to see *with* him. This occurs most obviously when we are given the illusion of looking with him through a pair of binoculars at Hollis Mulwray (Darrell Zwerling) investigating the dumping of water into the Los Angeles riverbed: here our vision is made to correspond exactly, and pointedly, to Jake's. Continually, though, the camera invites us to take up Jake's point of view either by eyeline match cuts or by showing us what Jake sees from a position that approximates his angle of vision, then moving back just enough to show Jake seeing it. As Dana Polan has put it, "the camera frequently takes up a position just alongside him (or over his shoulder) as if to filter the knowledge Gittes is receiving and deliver it to the spectator at the same time."[15]

We are also aligned with Jake by the attractions of his character, which are considerable. He's smart (he does, after all, uncover Noah Cross's [John Huston] conspiracy to own L.A.'s future) and reasonably good at his job—as measured by his success and notoriety (Barney [George Justin], the barber, refers to him as "practically a celebrity"), and by the skill with which he deploys the tricks of his trade (his use of watches to establish a time-frame for Hollis Mulwray's movements, his ease in outmaneuvering the clerk at the Hall of Records). He's confident to the point of cockiness

("I don't want to nail you," he says to Yelburton [John Hillerman], the man who has taken over the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power after Hollis Mulwray's death. "I want to find out who put you up to it. I'll give you a few days to think about it. Call me. I can help. Who knows? Maybe we can put the whole thing off on a few big shots and, uh, you can stay the head of the Department for the next twenty years"). And despite his taste for crude and off-color jokes, he displays a deadpan, ironic sense of humor calibrated to be winning (the fake Mrs. Mulwray [Diane Ladd] tells him her husband is cheating, and he responds, with only the slightest raise of an eyebrow, "No, really?" When this woman later telephones, now as Ida Sessions, she asks Jake if he is alone. "Isn't everyone?" he wryly responds). Most importantly, he has the good fortune to be able to draw from the deep well of Jack Nicholson's natural gifts. Because Nicholson, in the role, is charming and charismatic, wry and good-looking, so is Jake. The brilliance of the actor's bravura performance colors our response to the character.

The result of all these elements working together to create a kind of coincidence in perspective between Jake and the film's audience is that we not only see what he sees but *as* he sees. We gain access, that is, to the way Jake feels—or, better, the way it feels to be Jake. All the foreboding works, I want to suggest, as part of this apparatus of identification—not just to convey to the viewer, but to instill within the viewer, Jake's cynicism, his sense, at the end, that events have been fated, his despair. It's not that all the foreshadowing is merely subjective: at a couple of points, for instance, Evelyn touches the eye that will shortly be shot out. Feeling overwhelmed, at one point, she leans forward in a gesture of exhaustion and withdrawal, and her head sounds the horn of her car, just as it does at the film's conclusion when she is killed trying to escape. These things do happen; they happen, however, not to indicate that Evelyn's death is inevitable, but to put us in the position of *feeling* its inevitability, to put us in the position, that is, of sharing Jake's impression of her death.

To say that, over the course of the film, we come in some measure to occupy Jake's subject position probably captures the idea well enough, but not the richness of the experience, which is sufficiently seductive that it is difficult not to read the world Jake inhabits and the events that unfold the way he reads them. But there are good reasons for resisting the gravitational pull, as it were, of Jake's own sense of his experience. For as compelling a character as Jake is, and as fascinating as it is to register the world through him, his perceptions of himself and his world *are* often flawed. He

fails, for example, to recognize Ida Sessions for the actress she is. He misconstrues the relation between Katherine (Belinda Palmer) and Hollis Mulwray. He derisively dismisses a piece of evidence crucial to the series of relations he is investigating—the photo Walsh takes of Hollis and Noah Cross arguing outside the Pig and Whistle. He misreads, as kidnapping and coercion, Evelyn's attempt to comfort Katherine after the latter learns of Hollis's death. Fatally, he misidentifies the glasses he discoveries in the tide-pool in the Mulwrays' back yard. In addition to making these discrete mistakes, Jake errs more generally in evaluating character, his own and that of others. Because he sees himself as a hard-boiled gumshoe in the Sam Spade mold, he overestimates his ability to master his environment, and as a consequence gets forced to hand over the one piece of solid incriminating evidence in his possession to the very criminal he is trying to catch. Because he sees the whole of the world through the fairly narrow lens provided by his profession, he initially conceives of Hollis as a cheat and of Katherine as a vulgar chippie, when in fact the former virtually embodies integrity and the latter childlike innocence.

The same mindset that leads him into error regarding Mulwray and his stepdaughter produces more consequential misconceptions where Evelyn is concerned. From the outset, Jake is intrigued by Evelyn, in part because he finds her physically attractive, in part because, in her bearing and conversation, she is frankly sexual (she admits to having had many short-term affairs), in part because she is mysterious and Jake finds mysteries compelling. The trouble, of course, is that the very features that draw him to Evelyn also repel him: that is, her confessed promiscuity marks her as sexually available but also makes her potentially unreliable; and her mysteriousness may well be fascinating but it also makes her potentially untrustworthy. Throughout, therefore, Jake views Evelyn, despite his attraction to her, with a good deal of suspicion. At one point, he claims she is "hiding something." At another he accuses her of holding her husband's girlfriend against the girl's will. The suspiciousness comes to a head, however, when Jake discovers a pair of glasses in the artificial tide pool in the Mulwrays's back yard. Jake tracks Evelyn to the small house where Katherine has been staying and confronts her with what he considers the evidence of a murder she has committed.

The scene constitutes the most extended of *Chinatown*'s many allusions to *The Maltese Falcon* (1941).[16] At the conclusion of the latter, Sam Spade, having negotiated his way to something of a draw with the remaining bad guys (Guttman [Sydney Greenstreet] and Joel Cairo [Peter

Lorre]), calls the police to tell them how and where to pick up Guttman, Cairo, and the gunsel Wilmer (Elisha Cook, Jr.). Brigid O'Shaughnessy (Mary Astor), who thinks at this point that she still has Sam wrapped up, looks on quizzically as he makes his call. Sam then badgers Brigid into confessing to the murder of his partner, Miles Archer (Jerome Cowan), a man for whom Sam had little respect and less feeling. Before the police arrive, Sam explains why, despite the love he feels for Brigid, and despite his indifference to his partner, he's going to send her to prison or the gallows. If she isn't executed, Spade says, he'll wait the twenty years it will take her to get out of Tehachapi. There is an air of brutality in Sam's interrogation of Brigid. And his ability to make jokes about his lover's potential execution ("I hope they don't hang you, precious, by that sweet neck," he says while caressing her throat) borders on the psychotic. But the film pretty clearly endorses Sam's mastery of the situation (the resourcefulness and craftiness with which he solves the case and delivers the criminals, Brigid included), as well as his self-mastery (his ability to manage his emotions and give Brigid up).

Chinatown replays this scene in detail, starting with the private eye's call to his acquaintance on the police force with the suspect woman looking on in confusion. After Jake gets off the phone, he, like Sam, begins to interrogate the woman he loves—though Jake is more physically aggressive. He insists that Evelyn killed her husband and demands that she confess. He wants to know, he says, "the truth." He asks her about the young woman he still thinks of as Hollis Mulwray's lover: "Who is she?" he asks. "And don't give me that crap about your sister, because you don't have a sister."

Evelyn stutters: "I'll tell you … uh … I'll tell you the truth."

"Good," Jake says. "What's her name?"

"Katherine."

"Katherine who?"

"She's my daughter," Evelyn says abruptly, and Jake slaps her.

"I said I want the truth," he says, as all affect seems to drain from Evelyn's face.

"She's my sister," she says. Jake slaps her again.

"She's my daughter." Again, Jake hits her.

"My daughter, my sister," Evelyn blubbers as Jake slaps her twice more.

"I said I want the truth." Jake, now almost as hysterical as Evelyn, grabs her roughly by the shoulder and neck, then throws her against a wall and onto a couch.

"She's my sister *and* my daughter," Evelyn finally confesses, fully in tears.

At this point, similarities to the correlative scene in *The Maltese Falcon* cease: with Evelyn's reasons for being evasive now clear, it also becomes clear that, unlike Brigid, Evelyn is not the killer in the case.

Jake's being wrong about this effectively undermines his position, his way of being in the world, his very identity as masculine seeker of truth and justice. Again, Sam Spade is rough on Brigid, too, even cruel to her. But *The Maltese Falcon* expects and encourages its audience to excuse the cruelty as an acceptable, if not quite necessary, cost of uncovering a killer. But in order for the audience to feel at all comfortable with Sam's tactics, he *has* to be right. Otherwise his bullying of Brigid would simply seem sadistic. It would register *only* as a sign, or symptom, of a problem. And this is precisely how Jake's behavior registers in *Chinatown*. What we see is an abusive lout beating a painful confession out of a woman with whom we sympathize.

Chinatown's pointed recasting of a complete scene from *The Maltese Falcon*, which is central to the history of both the private eye film and film noir, surely serves as an aggressive gesture of genre revision. But the principal aim of the gesture is not to update the genres in question by debunking the idealized private-eye hero (as I'll argue momentarily, the notion that the private eye ever was idealized is itself problematic; the claim is *just* sustainable in relation to *The Maltese Falcon* but not in relation to that film's lineage). And the tone of the scene is anything but cynical. We don't, as the scene unfolds, despair. We become outraged.

What the reprise that Polanski and Robert Towne fashion here is designed to do, I think, is to fasten onto an array of interrelated elements of the scene as it is played in the earlier film—the private-eye hero's anxiety about women, his capacity for violence, his potential paranoia, sadism, and psychosis—that hovers at the edges, as it were, of that earlier text's consciousness and then foreground it. Again, In *The Maltese Falcon*, Spade's position—his status and stature, his identity, his *modus videndi*—is certainly endorsed, presented as a model of masculinity for the viewer. But in the scene where he forces Brigid to reveal herself and decides to "send her over," there is an air of real menace in his bearing, a viciousness bordering on the insane, that threatens to become part of the meaning of the film. It doesn't quite, because it is so overshadowed by other aspects of the movie, and because it emerges (or just misses emerging) at only a couple points. But this aspect of masculine brutality and abusiveness is nonetheless part

of *The Maltese Falcon*'s subtext. And subsequent private-eye films, especially those played in the mode or mood of noir, take this aspect of Huston's film and push it, to varying degrees, closer to the surface. It registers, for example, when Jeff Markham/Bailey (Robert Mitchum) tells Kathie Moffat in *Out of the Past* that she's "like a leaf that the wind blows from one gutter to another" and when, at the outset of *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker) whines that the woman he has just narrowly missed running down in the street, a woman, moreover, who is obviously vulnerable (she's wearing nothing but a trench coat) and on the run, "almost ruined [his] car." It is more evident in Dave Bannion's (Glenn Ford) easy assumption in *The Big Heat* (1953) that the b-girl Lucy Chapman (Dorothy Green) must be on the make when she contacts him to correct the official account of her former lover's death ("What's your pitch Lucy," he sneers. "Trying to use us for a shakedown?") and in his mean-spirited response to moll Debby Marsh's (Gloria Grahame) attempt to seduce him: "I wouldn't touch anything of Vince Stone's with a ten foot pole." It comes across more pointedly still in Scottie Ferguson's (James Stewart) treatment of shop girl Judy Barton (Kim Novak) in *Vertigo*, especially when, near the end of the film, he literally drags her up the stairs of a bell tower to force her to confess her crime at the place it was committed, the camera focusing on Judy's feet and legs as her shins bump painfully over the steps.

Bringing this sort of misogyny to the surface, making it a self-conscious feature of the text, functions as critique, not just in terms of aesthetics (as a commentary, for example, on the adequacy for a contemporary audience of certain generic conventions) but in terms of both cultural and (for want of a better word) actual politics as well. As an intervention in the realm of cultural politics, Jake's characterization draws attention to, and thus works to condemn, the misogyny underwriting, and effectively promulgated by, the representation of the conventional film detective. As an intervention in the realm of politics proper, Jake serves as negative example: his presentation constitutes a critique of the attitudes he embodies and the behavior those attitudes give rise to, both of which have their correlates in the real world of the film's audience.

That the lessons the film has to teach in this regard get beyond the obvious (men shouldn't abuse women) becomes apparent in the immediate aftermath of the scene described above. After Evelyn has finally coughed up the truth concerning her relation to Katherine, she looks up at Jake and, by way of explanation and surely also as a way to wound Jake

by forcing him to confront imaginatively what he has just forced her to confess, says, "My father and I…understand? Or is it too tough for you?" When Jake responds, more-or-less automatically, "He raped you?" Evelyn looks at him with profound pity tinged by disappointment, perhaps even disgust, and shakes her head "no." For the viewer, her expression and gesture work together as a kind of gloss on the limits of Jake's intelligence, imagination, and depth of understanding. The world, her look says (not so much to him but to us, because the very meaning of her manner of looking at him indicates that he is incapable of noticing and deciphering the way she is looking at him), is not that simple.

Which is not to say that Evelyn's expression acknowledges or signifies guilt: moments later, after all, in explaining why she initially gave Katherine up for others to raise, Evelyn says, "I was fifteen." The point, rather, is that there is a complexity involved in her relation with her father that Jake cannot comprehend and that his failure in this instance is symptomatic—as the preceding scene of the beating has itself perhaps already made clear: for at issue in Jake's striking Evelyn after every seeming contradiction in her confession is the conflict between the desire on his part to discover a simple, unequivocal truth and the complicated, equivocal nature of the world (his, ours) and its inhabitants. Jake needs to see better, to see with more subtlety, to see gradations, complexities.

To be able to see the world and its people better, the film makes clear, Jake needs to be able more fully to engage them. This he cannot do—a point *Chinatown* nearly belabors in a sequence of scenes starting with the post-coital conversation quoted above, a moment in the text I now want to consider in detail.

After Jake has explained why he considers Chinatown "bad luck," Evelyn asks whether the woman he tried to help got killed. The phone rings, abruptly breaking off their conversation. "Oh, my God," we hear Evelyn say into the phone. "Don't do anything. Don't do anything until I get there." She hangs up the phone, turns back to Jake.

Evelyn: I, uh, I have to go.
Jake: Where?
Evelyn: Just that. I have to.
Jake: I want to know where you're going.
Evelyn: Please. Don't be angry. It…it has nothing to do with you or with any of all of this.
Jake: Where are you going?

Evelyn: Please. [She covers her mouth with her hand, then touches his face.] Trust me this much. [She kisses him gently, but he doesn't return the kiss, keeps watching her through the embrace.] I'll be back.

The conversation continues, with Evelyn mentioning her father and Jake admitting that he'd met Cross earlier in the day, an admission that visibly upsets Evelyn. She tries to warn Jake that her father is not to be trusted. When Jake asks whether Cross might have been involved in Hollis's death, Evelyn says, "It's possible." "Now please," she continues, "don't ask me any more questions. Now, just wait. Wait for me here. I need you here." Evelyn then showers, which provides Jake the opportunity to sneak out of the house and kick the tail-light cover off her car, so he can more easily follow her. When she does leave the house, he tracks her to the bungalow where Katherine is being kept.

If we think of the whole of the scene as being bisected by the phone call, it presents itself as a structure of contrasting interrogations. It's a scene, that is to say, about asking questions—about the motives one might have for asking, and about the manner in which one asks. It opens with Evelyn quizzing Jake about his past. And *her* manner, clearly enough, is playful, teasing, tender. Her explicit aim is to establish deeper, more meaningful connections with Jake. "I don't know you," she says. "I want to know more about you." (Which is to say, more-or-less parenthetically, that it's also a scene about knowledge, about different ways of knowing, different reasons for wanting to know.) Evelyn here is—tentatively but surely—reaching out to Jake, a metaphor the film literalizes in her gesture of continuously caressing his face and chest and shoulder while she questions him.

The sound of the phone ringing signals the end of one movement, the beginning of another. Now, it is Jake's turn to quiz Evelyn. And the contrast couldn't be starker. Where she is gentle, solicitous, engaged—he is insistent, brutal, detached. Where she is seeking, in her questions, to come to a better understanding of Jake, to construct a shared experience, he wants only to know what she has done and will do, because such knowledge will, he thinks, enable him to master his experience. She fears the vulnerability of isolation ("I need you here," she says); he fears the vulnerability consequent to any involvement with others.

Presenting itself in the form of a doubled movement, a juxtaposition of two modes of approaching a single action, the scene invites us to draw

these comparisons, to evaluate the different ways these two scarred individuals respond both to one another, and to the opportunity they are being afforded here to emerge from the isolation into which their pain has caused them to withdraw. It invites us, to use the terms put into play in the preceding chapter, into the drama of a tense, almost tortured intersubjective experience. Neither Jake nor Evelyn, of course, has much reason to be trusting. And each remains a little cagey throughout—Evelyn in her own way almost as much as Jake. But only almost. And the difference here matters. Evelyn is evasive in her responses to Jake's questions. But her evasiveness stems mainly from a desire to protect, not herself, but her daughter Katherine. It may well be, too, a matter of simple expediency: under the circumstances, given Katherine's distress, she may just not have time to explain. Moreover, for all her evasiveness, Evelyn clearly *is* working here to let her guard slip. Although she has said to Jake earlier in the film that she can't really afford to let herself get close to anyone—a comment which is surely as she tells it a sort of lie, but which also probably happens to be true—here she tries very hard to get close to *him*, close enough, at any rate, to express her desires ("I want to know you better") and her needs ("I need you here").

Jake, for his part, isn't at all evasive: one imagines him, in fact, taking pride in always being as straightforward as his job at any given point allows. And throughout the scene he's perfectly frank in his responses to Evelyn. Everything is on the up and up. Everything—as they say—is jake. And yet the moment something happens that he can't conceptually "place," he withdraws emotionally, treating Evelyn as though she were a stranger. A few minutes later, in fact, when he's definitively abandoning her for the night—and after yet another effort on her part to induce him to stay ("Aren't you going…coming back with me?" she asks)—he will address her as Mrs. Mulwray: "Yeah, well, I'm tired, Mrs. Mulwray. Goodnight," he says wearily, and simply leaves.

It's important to keep in mind in this context that Jake has by this point—probably—fallen in love with Evelyn. The conclusion of the film, at any rate, can only work dramatically—can only carry the dramatic force that it has—if we assume that Jake *is* in love with Evelyn. And at a moment of emotional crisis for her, she pleads with him for his support. Jake walks away. His capacity for emotional disengagement under such circumstances registers, I want to suggest, not just as cruelty, but as a kind of sickness, a kind of dissociative disorder bordering on the pathological. To return to the ethical terrain of the preceding chapter: This, one wants to

say, is just what a failure of acknowledgment looks like. And the failure here hinges on Jake's insistence on knowing as a condition for acknowledging, which means Jake gets the ethical considerations backwards, exactly wrong.

In thus casting a negative light on the aloof posturing of the conventional fictional private detective, *Chinatown* offers a critique of the masculine/masculinist detachment that aloofness epitomizes. And it effectively argues for the feminist value of engaging others, the ethical value of acknowledging others despite the risks and entanglements involved in the work of such acknowledgement, given that perfect knowledge of the other is never possible. "Trust me just this much," Evelyn pleads. And if Jake were to do so, things might turn out differently.

That last, of course, is a speculative point: other paths, in this narrative, are not, finally, open to us. But I nonetheless want to put pressure on Jake's decision not to trust Evelyn, because the film, it seems to me, insists that we see his disengagement from Evelyn at a crucial moment in the narrative *as* a decision, as a choice among alternatives. He *could* trust Evelyn the night they have sex and wait for her to return from wherever it is she feels she has to go. In fact, *Chinatown* encourages us to want him to trust her. It does so, first, by enlisting our sympathies in her desire to establish some tentative emotional connection with Jake, then by focusing on her vulnerability and distress. And it does so by making his resistance seem inhuman. By summoning, in these ways, our desire for them to break through whatever barriers lie between them and somehow really *meet*, the film effectively lays Jake's alternatives before us and casts his decision not to trust Evelyn as a mistake.

The immediate consequence of this mistake is that Jake witnesses a scene (Evelyn seeming to be holding Katherine against the latter's will) whose ambiguity lends itself to misinterpretation. That misinterpretation, briefly suppressed (when Jake provisionally accepts Evelyn's explanation for having Katherine hidden away), then returns as a sort of retrospective corroboration for Jake's suspicion that Evelyn has killed Hollis in the tide-pool in their back yard. He forms that suspicion after finding a pair of glasses at the bottom of the tide-pool and jumping to the mistaken conclusion that the glasses belonged to Hollis Mulwray. He precipitously calls the police before confronting Evelyn with the supposed evidence of her crime. Once he discovers that the glasses did not, in fact, belong to Hollis (who didn't wear bifocals), Jake just as precipitously decides to confront the man he now (correctly) pegs as the killer—with the thoroughly

anticipatable result that he is forced to turn over the evidence of the murder to the killer himself and lead Cross to the very woman Jake is hoping to help escape. These are bad decisions, not the workings of fate. The decisions are made by a man with whom we sympathize but whom we also are put in a position to judge.

This matters because it bears on our reading of *Chinatown*'s conclusion, which, again, is generally taken to be the filmic equivalent of an existential shriek of despair. Such a reading only holds up, however, if we assume that the tragic events with which the movie ends are inevitable. That, surely, is how Jake sees things. But in this, as in so much else, Jake is wrong.

Chinatown's presentation of Jake as wrong is crucial to one of the film's principal aims: to teach us better how to read, to tutor us toward an engagement with the world and its people that is simultaneously sensitive and acute. There are two aspects to this process: Jake's experience; and our experience relative to Jake. *His* story is generally figured as some form of movement from ignorance to knowledge, blindness to devastating insight. Liahna K. Babener puts the point most directly: "the Jake Gittes who finally comprehends the sexual crime at the center of the maze … is transformed by his entry into the world of sin and sorrow," she asserts. "By the time he disentangles the convoluted network of treachery and deception and uncovers the sordid truth, Gittes is a changed man" (246). Frequently, this image of Jake uncovering an incomprehensible evil occasions comparisons with Oedipus. Wayne D. McGinnis, who initiates the line of inquiry comparing *Chinatown* to *Oedipus Rex* in a short article the year after the film was released, concludes his piece with the claim that "There is finally pity for the doomed, ignorant Gittes, just as there is pity for the blind Oedipus in Sophocles. Gittes' real sight, like Oedipus', comes too late."[17] Eaton, writing more than twenty years later, sounds precisely the same note: "Jake is now [after Evelyn has been killed] most like Oedipus at the end of the play, before he puts his own eyes out, no longer able to face the exposed truth his investigation has uncovered" (69).

Chinatown does, of course, extensively allude to the Oedipus story. But it is important to keep in mind that Gittes, unlike Oedipus, is repeating an earlier experience in his life when he produces the catastrophe that is the focus of the conclusion of the text. "I was trying," he tells Evelyn the night before she is killed, by way of explaining why Chinatown seems to him bad luck, "to keep someone from being hurt, and I ended up making sure that she was hurt." "Dead?" Evelyn asks. The question hangs as the

phone rings to interrupt their conversation, but there is no real doubt about the answer. What is so horrifying for Jake as he stands in the middle of the street looking at the dead woman whom he had so come to care for, is not the shocking truth that her death has somehow revealed but the uncanny familiarity of the experience. In the case of the classical text, there is no other mother with whom Oedipus has slept before the play begins, no other father he has earlier killed. The unveiling of the mystery of Oedipus' identity constitutes the tragedy of the tale. But Jake solves all the mysteries he has been pursuing well before the story turns tragic. Like him, we are shocked by Evelyn's confession, but that confession doesn't produce for the viewer, the way Oedipus' discovery of his lineage produces for the spectator of the play, a terrifying sense of a world collapsing; Evelyn explains her back story to Jake and the narrative moves on. And no one, I'm sure, would claim to be devastated by learning that Noah Cross killed his son-in-law and is effectively completing his purchase of the future L.A. What appalls at the conclusion of the film are Evelyn's needless death, Jake's understanding that he has inadvertently caused that death, and, most of all, his and our awareness that he has done this before, that he has somehow gotten stuck in a nightmarish existential loop, doomed, apparently, to restage endlessly the same horrible event.

Because this *is* the second time through for Jake—because he has previously managed to get another woman killed while trying to help her, and because he emerged from that trauma wounded, jaded, defensive, and emotionally withdrawn—it can't be innocence that produces the repetition with Evelyn. Jake *starts* the film cynical, detached. His first lines, for example, are a wise-crack to Curly (Burt Young), his client, who is tossing about Jake's office distraught over the pictures he has just seen of his wife having sex with another man: "Alright, Curly. Enough's enough. You can't eat the Venetian blinds. I just had 'em installed on Wednesday." This might be a pose, of course, designed to hide depths of feeling, a potentially debilitating capacity for emotional pain. But if it is a pose, Jake never really drops it—even at the moment of his greatest intimacy with Evelyn, whom he never addresses by first name. From first to last, he remains guarded, mistrustful—presenting himself always as the man who knows that appearances are deceiving, that people lie and cheat and steal. Given Jake's back story, of course, this callousness can't help coming across as wounded idealism—which, on some level, it is. But on the basis of what we see in the film, his capacity for idealism is in fact fairly limited—never extending far enough, for example, to involve taking a real risk, physical,

emotional, or otherwise. It's not idealism but cocksureness, for instance, that leads him to confront Cross. And the moment a wayward evidentiary finger seems to point in Evelyn's direction, he betrays her to the police. Jake may well have been wounded in the past. But given the circular nature of his experience as it is presented in the film, it is difficult to say, really, where or when this cycle of bruised feelings giving way to cynical detachment began. What is clear is that Jake *uses* his sense of having been wounded in the past as a present rationale for putting his own interests above others'. The woundedness, which may or may not reflect a capacity for real feeling, works in conjunction with the cynicism as part of a psychological system whose main effect is to keep Jake safely out of the fray, to keep him from meaningfully engaging others. And it is his failure to engage Evelyn, his inability to respond to an entreaty made by a woman he cares about—and not his innocence or idealism—that gets her killed.

Put it this way: Jake's past experience, however we conceive of it, has taught him to approach the world warily, with detachment and skepticism. Such wariness makes him a reasonably effective, low-level detective: it pushes him to ask questions (looking at the outside of the envelope that contains the check Evelyn has just used to pay him, he asks about the "C" in her initials) and prompts him to draw connections (having been told the "C" stands for Cross, he links Evelyn with the Noah Cross he sees in a picture on the wall of Hollis Mulwray's office at the Department of Water and Power). But the wariness also disables him in certain respects; for although it leads him to mistrust appearances, it makes it impossible for him to see that some things are better, not worse, than they appear to be. The very suspiciousness that makes Jake an acute reader of some aspects of existence renders him blind to other aspects. If he is simple, it is not the sunny simplicity of a Forrest Gump (Tom Hanks); rather, it is the poisonous simplicity of a character like Martin Scorsese's Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro), who, baffled by a world he is too blunt to comprehend, projects the deceptiveness he fears onto those around him. Paranoid, anxious, Polanski's Jake, like Scorsese's, reads malice into the most innocuous of gestures—a daughter's delight, for example, in showing off her new dress. He is too crude an instrument for registering a world that is good as well as bad, beautiful as well as mean, a world with people in it who are both noble *and* base.

Jake's limitations, in this regard, are evident at the outset and remain with him to the end. He learns, effectively, nothing from his experience with Evelyn—nothing, at any rate, that he didn't already know. "As little

as possible," Jake mumbles to no one in particular in the film's concluding moments, as if to identify a discovery he has made. But, again, the posture of studied detachment has been Jake's position all along. There is no *anagnorisis* here, no insight into a heretofore hidden truth. Jake is just affirming a belief he has always held, confirming an article of faith—that "life," to wrench Whitman's words out of context, "is a suck and a sell,"[18] and that therefore the best one can do is "as little as possible," which is, in fact, very nearly what Jake *has* done for Evelyn Mulwray.

I mentioned earlier that *Chinatown*'s tutorial on seeing comprises two elements, Jake's experience and our experience relative to Jake. For his part, Jake, I've been suggesting, fails to learn, a point the film makes explicit: "You never learn, do you Jake" Lieutenant Escobar says to him toward the end of the movie. At the time he says this, of course, we think the joke is on Escobar, whom Jake is at that moment tricking in order to buy time. But Escobar is right. Jake doesn't ever learn. He remains blind throughout—a point that gets emphasized by the film's myriad references to failed vision: broken glasses, flawed irises, wounded eyes. As Eaton has noted, "*Chinatown* is not just about seeing, but about seeing wrongly" (29). Our ability to know that Jake sometimes sees "wrongly" depends, however, on our maintaining a certain distance from the character. If our identification with him were complete, our assessment of his character would depend entirely on Jake's *self*-assessment. We wouldn't be in a position to notice that he is cocksure and at times insensitive, because Jake doesn't really notice these aspects of his character himself. In terms of sensitivity, his own evaluation, surely, would be that he is too sentimental, too apt to want to play the knight in shining armor. What *we* see, however, is a man whose efforts at engaging others seem half-hearted. We do notice Jake's flaws, in sum, because the film works in subtle ways to hold us just a bit apart from the character. On the other hand, if we didn't identify at all with Jake, we wouldn't care about what happens to him. His story would not hold us as it does. That it does so hold us I take as a given. The critical and popular success *Chinatown* met with at the time of its release, and the continuing interest the film attracts among film scholars all affirm that we find this narrative compelling. *Chinatown*, then, develops a complicated point of view—a version of the sort of filmic free indirect discourse mentioned in Chap. 4 that requires the audience to be both emotionally engaged and critically discerning.

As I've already suggested, Polanski's film invites us to identify with Jake; and some element of that invitation is extended by means of

point-of-view shooting and shot/reverse shot editing. But the identification with Jake becomes, as the movie progresses, increasingly uncomfortable and finally untenable, troubled as it is by other aspects of the film—principally the narrative content, as it systematically exposes Jake's limitations, and our growing identification with Evelyn. Like our identification with Jake, our identification with her is produced in part by camera work that aligns us with her point of view. When we first see Evelyn, for example, she is standing behind Jake listening, without his knowledge, as he relates to Walsh and Duffy the racist joke he heard from the barber. Before she is brought into the scene, however, the camera is set up to present the action from the position she will assume: behind Jake and slightly to his left, so that we see the back of his head, his left ear, part of his profile, Walsh and Duffy facing the camera, their faces registering both consternation and amusement at Jake's insistence on putting his foot in his mouth. When the camera shifts to take up a position in front of Jake, in order to reveal Evelyn watching as he makes an ass of himself, it becomes clear that the position it has just switched from is the position she now holds. And it is her point of view that controls the whole of the scene, before her arrival and after: Jake comes across as a complete vulgarian, a braying buffoon (Image 7.1). When, in subsequent scenes, Jake and Evelyn share scenes, they also share the screen, nearly always in some form of two-shot. We aren't, that is, invited to see *her* through his eyes. She is never fetishized by the camera or presented merely as an object of Jake's vision. When we watch her, we watch a woman gifted with intelligence,

Image 7.1 Seeing Jake

depth, sensitivity and complexity caught for us in the process of thinking and feeling.

Perspective, however, isn't everything. As Nick Brown demonstrated long ago in his discussion of a scene from John Ford's *Stagecoach*, the point of view from which the action in a film gets presented doesn't determine the spectator's point of identification. "As a powerful emotional process," Brown argues, identification "throws into question any account of the position of the spectator as centered at a single point or at the center of any simply optical system. Identification … necessarily has a double structure in the way it implicates the spectator in both the position of the one seeing and the one seen… [W]e do not 'identify' with the camera but with the characters."[19] Examining Brown's substantiation of these claims would take me too far afield here; but the force of the observation can, in any case, be better brought home by means of a brief consideration of a film more closely linked, thematically, to *Chinatown*—Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, a movie notorious for the rigor with which its director limits the text's point of view to that of its principal character, Scottie Ferguson, like Jake a wounded former police detective trying to slip from under the burden of his traumatic past. Point of view shooting and shot/reverse shot editing dominate: much of the film is taken up alternately watching Scottie watch and seeing what he sees. His point of view even controls elements of scenes that are not presented, in any literal sense, from his perspective—as, for example, the scene described in Chap. 6 where Scottie first embraces Madeleine as they stand on the beach. But for all the film's work wedding our perceptions to Scottie's, our view of him changes measurably over the course of the narrative. During the first half, when Scottie pursues and falls in love with Madeleine, the film encourages us—mainly by the way it defines him as a character—to identify. During the second half, as Scottie seeks to resurrect the now-dead Madeleine, to construct her out of the, as he sees it, rag-tag and bob-ends that life has made available in the form of Judy Barton, our identification with Scottie breaks down under the pressure of, first, our growing sense of the brutality underlying his idealism and, second, our increasing identification with Judy. In terms of technique nothing changes: the second half of the film is shot just like the first. And yet our relationship to the character is utterly transformed. Indeed, the point of the movie, I would argue, hinges on this shift. *Vertigo*, that is, plays the same narrative (of fated love) twice, first straight, then as parody or critique. Our identification with Scottie during the first run-through implicates us in the ideology that the second half of the film (mostly)

deconstructs. The doubled, revisionary structure of Hitchcock's film thus pushes viewers toward critical self-confrontation. Something similar happens in *Chinatown*, in the tensions that get put into play by our inclination to identify with Jake and our growing awareness of the discomforts produced by that inclination.

In general terms, criticism on the film has responded well to the challenge posed by its complex point of view. When it comes to the film's conclusion, however, the criticism has faltered because critical distance from Jake, at that point, has tended to collapse. The critics, in simply accepting at face value Jake's own sense of his experience, effectively recapitulate Jake's failure to learn from that experience. We are supposed to see better. The film is trying to teach us how.

The lessons the film teaches by means of Jake's response to Evelyn need, moreover, to be brought to bear on our consideration of his understanding of Chinatown. For even those very few texts that don't simply repeat Jake's reading of Chinatown as figurative space, synecdoche for a world without discernible order, tend in some way or another to reinscribe it.

William Galperin, for example, ostensibly revises the standard view. Rather than looking at Chinatown as a symbol of life's indeterminacy or unknowability or as figure for existential malevolence, Galperin—developing a line of inquiry undoubtedly initiated by Stewart—wants to see it as a means by which the movie evokes or points toward (rather than presents or circumscribes) an inchoate "real" that defies representation: "'Chinatown' … is not a representational eventuality … but rather an anti-representational obstruction: a reminder of the 'life' that having once begun resists imitation or mediated reflection" (1161). The intrusion of this "alien order" into the film constitutes (1157), for Galperin, an assault on Western modes of representation, and thus constitutes, as well, an attack on Western ideation and Western values.

This presentation of Chinatown as an outside of, or Other to, representation provides a useful enough dislocation of the critical discourse inasmuch as Galperin neither ignores the potential problem posed by a stereotyped representation of Asians, nor thoughtlessly condemns *Chinatown*—as one or two critics have done—as simply being racist. (Indeed, on his account, the film effectively deconstructs the modes of conceptuality on which racism depends.) But while from the deconstructive perspective on offer in Galperin's essay the *content* of the Chinatown motif shouldn't matter, since Chinatown, from this perspective, should be

something of a void, a "deconstructed presence," ideas about the "alien order" Chinatown evokes gradually accrete in the essay. Content seeps into the void. And the ideas that start to circulate around Chinatown seem surprisingly familiar, given the seeming shift in focus. A discussion of the ways the film uses Venetian blinds, for example, gives rise to a reference to "vision more mysterious, more murky, more fluid than we may be inclined to expect, indeed to 'want,'" while the whole of the Venetian motif "compels us to accept mystery and at the film's end darkness as truths beyond understanding" (1162–63).

The sophistication of Galperin's observations notwithstanding, the basic points being made here are not all that dissimilar to central claims compulsively iterated in earlier work on the film—that the references to Chinatown and the Chinese in Polanski's film serve to sustain a conventional association of the East with inscrutability, that the movie ends bleakly insisting on the darkness of human experience and on the limits of human agency. Will they, nill they, the critics keep finding themselves, like Jake, back in the same old Chinatown.

As is the case with the protagonist of Polanski's film, I have been trying to insist, this is a world of the critics' own making. The Chinatown of mystery and darkness, of corruption and unfathomable complexity is not, that is to say, in the film at all. Or, more precisely, it is in the film only to the extent that it is in Jake's head. It exists only as a reflection of Jake's way of looking at himself, his world, and his experience—in the same way that the femme fatale exists in the film only as a reflection of Jake's view of women and of life. Notoriously, for example, Chinatown as space gets presented only once in the film, briefly, during its concluding scene. And as Stewart has pointed out, "the actual place, when we end up there, is in no way persuasively visualized" (28). But while Stewart draws, I think, the appropriate conclusion from this observation, that "Chinatown is a subjective locale, a ghetto of the mind," he universalizes that mind, collapsing the distinction between Jake and the viewer ("like Gittes we know we have been there before"[28]), eventually associating Chinatown with the dark spirit of the times: "The title *Chinatown* … is … a metaphor and a euphemism for death—physical, spiritual, even cultural" (32). Again, he'd be right if the film endorsed Jake's sense of the fatedness of his experience. But, as I have said, it doesn't. Jake ends up on Alameda Street, not as a result of the machinations of a malign fate, but as a consequence of bad decisions—most of them having to do with his incapacity, as Thomas Leitch has pointed out, for "thinking about other people as people" (213).

My point is that this disability of Jake's, which is so evident in his relation to specific individuals, gets subtly echoed by, and generalized in, his insistence on projecting another culture as the Other, as alien and impenetrable. The film has little to say about that culture, as reality *or* as idea, except inasmuch as it functions as an idea for Jake. The movie is about him, about his way of seeing things: his way of conceiving of the world, himself, and others. *Chinatown* is deeply critical of that mode of perception, which it marks—by focusing on Jake's perceptions of women and minorities, and by situating Jake so thoroughly in the tradition of private-eye fiction and film, a tradition centered thematically around a white, male protagonist's conceptions of women and minorities, most frequently Asians—as Western, white, and male. Launching such a critique constitutes, of course, a political statement. Attempting to transform viewers by means of their experience of the film constitutes a political act. Far from the quiescent, nihilistic capitulation it is sometimes taken to be, or the despairing *cri de coeur* most critics have seen it as, *Chinatown* works at changing the world by changing the ways people relate to one another—by transforming, that is, the way they see. By laying bare Jake's perceptual and conceptual limitations the film effectively argues for increased sophistication, subtlety, and sensitivity in our interactions with the world and with one another. By the *form* of its critique of Jake *Chinatown* effectively seeks to engender that sophistication, subtlety, and sensitivity in the people watching the film.

* * *

When *Chinatown* was first released, it was generally understood that the movie functions at some level as an allegory for the American experience in Vietnam, with Jake representing the naïve American who gets in over his head in a culture he is ill-equipped to understand and Chinatown serving as a figure for the inscrutable Asian quagmire. One of the main aims of this essay has been to examine the ways such a reading does and does not work. Jake's blunders are real enough—as is the mess he makes of his life and others'. But that mess is not an aspect of the world Jake inhabits. Nor is it meaningfully symbolized by the Asian characters or Asian environment the film presents to the viewer. The quagmire is a construction, a function of Jake's ways of seeing. And the blundering is predicated on his misperceptions, his fantasies, his projections. That the blunderings, misperceptions, and projections are not Jake's alone recent American

history makes clear. Like Jake, the country as a whole keeps restaging the same stupid, traumatic experience, unable to learn from its mistakes. We need to start getting smarter, more perceptive, more sensitive. The work of interpreting the film, I've been trying to suggest, can help teach us how.

Notes

1. Vernon Shetley, "Incest and Capital in *Chinatown*," *MLN* 114.5 (1999), 1101. Like me, Shetley sees *Chinatown* as deeply critical of Jake's "limited imagination" (1103) and of his "refusal to trust Evelyn, a refusal for which the film asks us, in the end, to hold Jake to account" (1102). Although my own thinking on *Chinatown* predates my reading of Shetley's essay, the present text might usefully be considered a kind of extended gloss on, and elaboration of, Shetley's insights.
2. John G. Cawelti, "*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 231, 234, hereafter cited in text.
3. Thomas Leitch, "*Chinatown* and the Private-Eye Film," in *Crime Films* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 213, 202, hereafter cited in text.
4. Garrett Stewart, "The Long Goodbye from *Chinatown*," *Film Quarterly* 28.2 (1974–75), 27, 28, hereafter cited in text.
5. Richard T. Jameson, "Film Noir Today: Son of Noir," *Film Comment* 10.6 (November–December 1974), 33.
6. James Maxfield, "'The Injustice of It All': Polanski's Revision of the Private Eye Genre in *Chinatown*," in *The Fatal Woman: Sources of Male Anxiety in American Film Noir, 1941–1991* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses), 127.
7. See, e.g., John Belton, "Language, Oedipus, and *Chinatown*," *MLN* 106.5 (1991), 946, hereafter cited in text; Deborah Linderman, "Oedipus in *Chinatown*," *enclitic* 5–6 (1980–81), 198; and Shetley, 1102.
8. The ghostlike-ness of that presence serves as hinge for William Galperin's discussion of *Chinatown* as deconstructive text. See William Galperin, "'Bad for the Glass': Representation and Filmic Deconstruction in *Chinatown* and *Chan is Missing*," *MLN* 102.5 (1987), 1151–70, hereafter cited in text.
9. R. Barton Palmer, "*Chinatown* and the Detective Story," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 5.2 (1977), 115.
10. Michael Eaton, *Chinatown* (London: BFI, 1997), 65, hereafter cited in text. To be fair, Eaton sees the film, not as cynical, but as classically tragic. But it finally becomes a bit difficult to distinguish between tragedy and

nihilism, if not cynicism, as his ideas play out. At the conclusion of his analysis, which deals with the film's conclusion, Eaton argues, for example, that what Jake comes to recognize after Evelyn is killed is that "the depravity of the social world is irredeemable" (69).

11. Leitch's insightful and compelling analysis can serve, I think, as a measure of the difficulties involved in holding onto a coherent view of *Chinatown*. On the one hand, Leitch sees the film as participating in a broader effort undertaken by private-eye movies made in the wake of "the women's liberation movement of the early 1970s" to subject "the private eye's aggressive masculinity" to "searching critique" (200). He also recognizes that *Chinatown* shines a critical light on its protagonist, whom it marks as a failure. And Leitch is one of the very few critics who correctly (in my view) identifies the nature of Jake's disability:

    > Gittes fails … not because he is a poor specimen of the private eye, but because he is a perfect specimen. His cynicism, his impulsiveness, even his bullying brashness, makes him good at his job.… What he does not have is a way of thinking about other people as people. He is egregiously blind to the true nature of the gentle dreamer Hollis Mulwray. More damningly, he never appreciates Evelyn Mulwray's complexity. (213)

    Leitch gets everything right in this sensitive analysis of Jake. But then, rather than drawing what would seem to be the logical conclusion from these fine insights—that Polanski's film, in launching a critique of conventional representations of masculinity in private eye movies, is attempting to effect positive changes in the world it addresses—Leitch strangely insists on seeing *Chinatown* as essentially defeatist: "In what amounts to a historical summary of the hard-boiled hero's progress from Philip Marlowe's masculine heroism to Mike Hammer's hypermasculine hysteria to the paralysis of *The Conversation*'s Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), *Chinatown* suggests that the irreducible complexity of the people pressed into service as suspects and criminals and detectives, and the irreversible contamination of natural resources by cultural imperatives, guarantee the failure of any possible quest for justice or truth" (214). My sense of things, as I'll argue more fully below, is that there is something powerfully seductive about Jake's cynicism that makes it almost impossible to resist. That doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't try.

12. See, e.g., Murray Sperber, "'Do As Little As Possible': Polanski's Message and Manipulation," *Jump Cut* 3 (1974), 10; James Kavanagh, "*Chinatown*: Other Places, Other Times," *Jump Cut* 3 (1974): 8; and Stephen Farber, "Movies That Reflect Our Obsession with Conspiracy and Assassination," *New York Times*, 11 August 1974, sec. D, p. 20.

13. Chinatown, notes William Pechter, is "a metaphor for the impenetrable nature of that morass into which its private-detective hero finds himself sinking" ("Everyman in Chinatown," *Commentary*, September 1974, 73). Sperber refers to it as a "symbol of human corruption, chaos, and immorality unimaginable to most straight [?] Westerners" (9). Cawelti calls it a "symbolic locus of darkness, strangeness, and catastrophe" (232). For Liahna K. Babener, Chinatown "is the unknowable and unfathomable city within a city, the ultimate metaphor for enigma, corruption and doom … a place of corruption … insidious pollution" ("Chinatown, City of Blight," in *Los Angeles in Fiction: A Collection of Original Essays*, ed. David Fine [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984], 250, hereafter cited in text.)
14. See Eaton, 32–35.
15. Dana Polan, "*Chinatown*: Politics as Perspective, Perspective as Politics," in *The Cinema of Roman Polanski: Dark Spaces of the World*, eds. John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 111.
16. In an earlier version of this essay, I trace out in more detail Chinatown's extensive allusions, not just to *The Maltese Falcon*, but to film noir more generally considered and to the novels on which many film noirs were based. See Phillip Novak, "The *Chinatown* Syndrome," *Criticism* 49.3 (2007), 280, n. 22.
17. Wayne D. McGinnis, "*Chinatown*: Roman Polanski's Contemporary Oedipus Story," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 3, no.3 (1975), 245.
18. Walt Whitman, "Walt Whitman," *Poems of Walt Whitman (Leaves of Grass)* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1902), p. 34. This work can be found online at books.google.com. The quote is from the poem that eventually came to be titled "Song of Myself."
19. Nick Browne, "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach*," in Nichols, Vol. II, 469.

CHAPTER 8

"It's Like Waking": Making Meaning in and of Christopher Nolan's *Memento*

The paths I follow in my pursuit of Christopher Nolan's *Memento* will, I think, seem familiar, since I see the movie as being conceptually related to Polanski's *Chinatown*. Like the latter, *Memento* is about seeing and failing to see, knowing and failing to know, acknowledging and failing to acknowledge. Like *Chinatown*, Nolan's film works by way of negative example. And like *Chinatown* it aims—by means of the forms of misprision that it encourages then exposes—at tutoring viewers toward more perceptive and sensitive engagement with the world, our relation to the text in its tortuous unfolding serving the function of a sort of experiment, modeling both how to get both reading and relations wrong and how to get them right.

As is the case with *Chinatown*, too, much has already been written about the film. Indeed, in the relatively short time that has passed since its release in 2000, *Memento* has generated a remarkable amount of critical commentary: three books have been dedicated to consideration of the movie; and by my last count nearly fifty journal articles or book chapters center around discussion of the film or use it as either a point of comparison or as a significant example. But whereas the bulk of the writing addressing *Chinatown* is interpretive in nature, most of what has been written about *Memento* is not.[1] Thus again in the case of Nolan's movie, the body of interpretive work that has developed around the film is large enough to push against but not so large as to allow no room to maneuver. Then, too, as I will go on to argue, much of the extant analysis of *Memento* just gets the film wrong.

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_8

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"Are you watching closely?" This line, delivered in voice over, accompanies the enigmatic opening image—a collection of identical top hats lying scattered incongruously on the ground in an unidentified wood—of Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006). The status of the comment, as well as that of the image, within the diegesis is uncertain, since the image relates to nothing that immediately follows, and the comment, while voiced by a character, is addressed to no one *in* the film. The line does connect in ways to the narrative content, which concerns magic and magicians, and it does bear in some sense on the dialogue that closely follows this quick opening scene and that begins the narrative proper: an explanation of the structure of magic tricks being offered by a secondary character, played by Michael Caine, to the daughter (sort of) of the character who asked the initial question. Really, though, that question is addressed to the film's audience, and, situated as a kind of epigraph, it serves as a warning. The admonition—to pay attention—functions most immediately as preparation for the particular plot twists that conclude *The Prestige*, of course, but the advice might well serve as setup for Nolan's work generally: with their convoluted storylines, their false leads, and their scrambled chronologies, Nolan's movies not only invite, but frequently require, close attention.

Many of Nolan's films, like *The Prestige*, compel this attentiveness by means of structure, turning on last-minute revelations that revise earlier understandings and force the viewer to replay events—in mind if not in fact—and to reconsider, in a sense to re-watch, what she has seen. Near the outset of *The Prestige*, just after the opening sequence described above, one of the two main characters, Robert Angiers (Hugh Jackman), dies while performing a magic trick. During the movie's concluding sequence, we learn that what we thought we knew about Angiers is at least partly wrong, for a very living Angiers once again turns up. He is not, after all it seems, truly dead. Or rather, since nothing in the film is simple or straightforward, he both is and he isn't dead: the man who died at the beginning, we learn in *The Prestige*'s concluding reel, was one of two versions of the magician, who replicates himself, then kills himself (murdering either himself or a copy of himself, depending on how one looks at it), every time he performs this particular trick. Similarly, in a concatenation of reversing revelations over the course of the conclusion of *Following* (1998), Nolan's debut feature, we learn first that Cobb (Alex Haw), a character we thought

to be in league with Bill (Jeremy Theobald), the protagonist, has, in fact, been setting Bill up, and, second, that the woman we discover during the first reversal to be Cobb's accomplice in bringing Bill down—a femme fatale figure identified in the credits only as The Blonde (Lucy Russell)—has herself been used by Cobb, who is playing a layered game of betrayal. Each reversal forces a revision of our view of Cobb and of the preceding events of the movie, a text whose logic and meaning we have to piece together retrospectively as we watch the credits roll.

Nowhere is Nolan's penchant for complexity and revisionary plot twists put to more pointed and effective use than in his sophomore effort, *Memento*. The complexity is intrinsic, since the film's structure, notoriously tortuous, makes making even the most basic sense of the narrative a challenge. Indeed, Nolan himself has noted that, after having seen the movie "thousands of times," he thinks he would still have difficulty getting his bearings were he to be dropped into the story at random.[2] If we are to process what we see, "watching closely" is thus a minimum requirement. More importantly, picking up where *Following* left off—but pushing the issue further—*Memento*, by means of the surprising revelation that comes near its end, prompts viewers, not simply to reevaluate what they understand to have happened, but to examine *why* they came to such an understanding. The film is designed, that is, to produce a kind of critical *self*-reflection: in order to comprehend the text, we effectively have to come to comprehend how and why we've come to misconstrue what we've seen. Self-interrogation is thus a necessary consequence of attempting to read the movie.

In some sense of course, the sort of critical self-understanding that *Memento* activates is always a product of engaged analysis. Which is to say only that something like enlightenment is always at issue in the reading of film. *Memento*'s value is that it works so assiduously to bring this general truth to light. That, at least, is what I propose here to argue: that, by means of its convoluted structure and twist ending, and by thematizing the problem of interpretation, *Memento* aims at teaching the viewer what it means to read and making clear to the viewer why reading well matters.

This tutorial function depends for its effectiveness, of course, on the stability and reliability of the narrative. Thus a subsidiary aim in what follows is to push against what has become, in the interpretive work done to date, the predominant view of the film—that *Memento* in its slipperiness is paradigmatically postmodern.

That is, most readings of the movie that have been offered start from similar assumptions and/or arrive at similar conclusions, situating *Memento* in relation to some aspect of—in Lyotard's formulation—the "postmodern condition." Thus Carlos Gallego argues that "*Memento* presents a self-reflexive, spatial embodiment—a dialectical image—of the postmodern divide."[3] Rosalind Sibielski sees the movie as both reflection of and engagement with the postmodern: "While the film employs a visual style and narrative structure which embrace a … postmodern aesthetic, it also … ultimately engages in the debate over how 'the postmodern' is defined."[4] For Robbie B. H. Goh, Nolan's film exemplifies a "chronoschizophrenia," a "sense of the normative nature of linear chronological disruptions, replaying loops and achronic overlays," that characterizes postmodern life.[5]

Such readings of *Memento*, and nearly all readings of the film of any stripe, are grounded in a sense of the narrative's indeterminacy, its insistence on the illusive, subjectively constructed nature of the real.[6] *Memento*'s "formal complexity underscores the film's central theme of unreliability," writes Gallego (41). "*Memento* is in many ways about the unreliability of all the signs one might encounter in contemporary urban life," echoes Goh (69). Sibielski's formulation of the idea is as follows: "it is impossible for either Leonard within the film's narrative or the film's spectators examining it, to ever achieve a definitive accounting of Leonard's past" (99).

Two points: first, I think the standard view that the surface narrative of *Memento* is indeterminate and undeterminable is demonstrably wrong. Character construction in the film is complicated, and the narrative as a whole is very complexly articulated. A few issues—how much time has passed, for example, between the trauma that incapacitates Leonard and the events that we see unfold in the film—*are* left ambiguous. But by the final frames of the movie, nearly all the central story elements are, I will argue, firmly locked into place. Indeed, on my account, *Memento* is unusually, almost obsessively, determinate: indeed, the only way the narrative can work to prod the kind of self-examination that I see as central to its unfolding is by playing bad readings against good ones—by first leading the viewer into error, then exposing the error—and that process requires a stable structure, something to measure misinterpretation against.

Second, the will to frame and categorize tends to lead to simplification and a too ready equation of parts and wholes. *Memento*'s flamboyant style, for example, is often cited as one of the principal ways it signals its postmodernism. But while it is true that Nolan made the film with

postmodern technology and viewing practices in mind, the specific stylistic features that mark the movie—overt, self-conscious stylization; a focus on subjective presentation that functions, effectively, as a film-specific analog to fiction's free indirect discourse; narrative complexity, fragmentation, recursivity—all seem strikingly *modernist* in terms of aim, effect, and tone, more aligned with the preoccupations of Proust, Pound, Woolf, and Eliot than with those of Pynchon or Coover. And although the unidentified urban setting of *Memento*, which is anonymous, homogeneous, and conceptually ungraspable, surely seems, at first blush, like paradigmatic Jamesonian postmodern space, it is worth keeping in mind that Nolan's acknowledged model for the setting of *Memento* was the *modern* cityscape of film noir.[7] As for main character Leonard (Guy Pearce): with his elusive identity and his inability to order his experience, he surely seems in some ways, as Tracy K. Parker has put it, "the ultimate postmodern subject."[8] But as a few critics have pointed out, Leonard's penchants and proclivities (his truth seeking, his mania for mapping, and his fetishization of facts) work to align him, not with postmodern, but with Enlightenment, values.[9] My point here is simply that while *Memento* is surely engaged in a variety of ways with postmodern culture and with a number of currents of postmodern thought, the form of that engagement is more uneven and conflicted than most analyses allow.

* * *

Through most of its unfolding *Memento* presents a consistently sympathetic image of its protagonist, Leonard Shelby, a character with whom we are clearly meant to identify—despite the fact that when we are introduced to him he has just finished shooting another man in the back of the head and has snapped a Polaroid of the dead man to keep as a kind of trophy. Leonard is made sympathetic, first of all, by the exceptional vulnerability produced by his affliction, anterograde amnesia (an incapacity, caused in his case by brain injury, to produce new memories). In order to negotiate the simplest of daily tasks, he has to tote around a host of memory aids that encumber his movements and confuse as much as they enlighten. He must constantly, painfully, piece together his experience from the clues around him when, every few minutes, he wakes into a new life. And he is teased and exploited by virtually everyone he meets. Teddy (Joe Pantoliano), Leonard's longest-standing acquaintance, turns him into a kind of unconscious robo-assassin. Natalie (Carrie-Ann Moss), who sleeps

with Leonard and aids him in his quest, nonetheless manipulates him into a dangerous confrontation in order to dispose of a threat. Even the good-natured, mostly honest Burt (Mark Boone, Jr.), low-key hotel clerk, takes advantage of Leonard's weakness, renting him two rooms instead of one at The Discount Inn, because, as Burt sheepishly admits, "business is slow."

Leonard is also made sympathetic by the history of trauma that produced his affliction and by the way that trauma is made to seem to be representative. His pain is particular, his condition extreme, but his experience feels achingly familiar. Like almost everyone who lives long enough, for example, Leonard has lost someone he loved. And like the grief-stricken everywhere he is haunted by the memory of that loss—a problem made more acute in his case by his inability to build a life beyond the moment when his wife was taken from him. As Leonard himself puts it, he can't heal because he can't "feel time." He can't move beyond his grief because he can't "remember to forget" his wife. Every time he wakes—and Leonard, because of his anterograde amnesia, is continually awakening—his pain is new to him. Every few minutes, he is born again into suffering. Watching him, we are asked to imagine what that would be like—to project ourselves into the experience of living perpetually in the immediate aftermath of devastating loss. And we cannot help, I think, but to feel for Leonard, cannot help but to feel with him.

Moreover, throughout the film, Leonard's response to his situation is charted in everyday emotional terms that make it easy to relate. He is marked as lonely, for example, as someone who longs for human contact ("Call me back?" he says hopefully to a stranger on the phone). He actively seeks sympathetic engagement from others, a point made repeatedly in references to his obsessive need to narrate his experience: "You tell everybody about Sammy," an exasperated Teddy informs Leonard near the end of the movie. "Everybody who'll listen." He is angry at the injustice that he sees as having befallen him, confused by the impenetrability of intersecting and often conflicting motivations, including his own, and guilt ridden by a nagging sense of his potential for being in the wrong. Like most people, he is sometimes plagued by feelings of helplessness, occasionally overcome by a sense of the pointlessness of his experience and endeavors.

If we are aligned with Leonard, however, because of his weaknesses, we are also, paradoxically, aligned with him because of his strengths; for when Leonard is not being made to look like that other Lennie (Smalls, that is,

from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*), he is being made to look like an updated version of Sam Spade, by way, perhaps, of James Bond. Through much of the movie, for example, he is sharply dressed and driving a Jaguar convertible. Despite having spent the bulk of his life as an insurance investigator, he has somehow become, by the time we meet him, adept with small arms. And his devotion to the mission of avenging the rape and murder of his wife serves to underscore his passion and commitment. He is smart, self-deprecating, funny, charming, and earnest. He is brave and noble, chivalrous as a matter of course. When Natalie claims that her drug dealer boyfriend's associate, Dodd (Callum Keith Rennie), has beaten her, Leonard casually takes on her cause: "I'll give him a few lumps of his own and tell him to find someone named Teddy," he says with a shrug, despite Natalie's warning that Dodd is a killer. And if all that were not enough, Leonard is played by a handsome Hollywood leading man type possessed of an impossible physique, a dazzling smile, and incredible charisma. With the spiked blond hair and extensive tattooing adding just the right touch of bad boy panache, Leonard in fact comes across as a somewhat more gaunt, slightly less self-consciously sexy version of Brad Pitt's Tyler Durden. The attractions here, that is to say, are meant to be palpable.

The film's structure and cinematography also both work to connect the viewer to Leonard. As almost everyone who has written about *Memento* has noted, and as Nolan himself has frequently acknowledged, the reverse chronology of the main (color) sequence of the movie serves to put the viewer (as much as is possible) into Leonard's cognitive/psychic/existential position. "The story," as Nolan put it during an interview for the Independent Film Channel, "is told in as subjective a way as we were able to do."[10] And that subjectivity, as Nolan also makes clear, was meant to be reinforced by the camerawork: "the color sequences are intensely subjective," he notes on the commentary track for the DVD. "As far as the blocking went, you know, where we put the camera was very important. And what we were trying to do was always kind of be over his shoulder, always kind of pushing in with him." Through nearly the whole of the film, what we see is determined by what Leonard is able to see, and what we know is determined by his cognitive limitations. As is the case with *Chinatown*, the protagonist effectively becomes our guide and our surrogate.

In the last moments of *Memento*, however, our sense of the character is shattered by Teddy's revelation that Leonard has fabricated a version of his experiences to cover or displace a reality he finds too painful to confront.

Leonard, of course, believes that he was permanently disabled and his wife was raped and murdered during the course of a burglary gone bad. He believes that the man who robbed him of his capacity to form new memories and who killed his wife—a man he refers to as John G.—is still at large. And he has dedicated himself to the task of tracking down and executing this murderer. As part of the regimen of conditioning he uses to motivate himself and to negotiate the complexities of day-to-day living while he searches for his wife's killer, Leonard continually rehearses the cautionary tale of Sammy Jankis (Stephen Tobolowski), a man who, like Leonard, suffered from anterograde amnesia but who couldn't learn to cope with his disability. Sammy, Leonard believes, lacked the means and will to provide purpose to his existence and became, as a result, a source of anxiety and frustration for his diabetic wife, who allowed Sammy to administer to her a fatal overdose of insulin as part of a desperate test of the physiological reality of his condition. Leonard obsessively narrates the Sammy Jankis story because, Leonard tells us in voice over, "Sammy's story helps [him] to understand [his] own situation."

Teddy, in the last scene of the film, substantially revises this narrative. "Sammy," Teddy insists, "didn't have a wife." "Sammy was a conman, a faker," whom Leonard exposed during the course of a claims investigation. "It was [Leonard's] wife," Teddy says, "who had diabetes." And it was Leonard, not Sammy, who administered the fatal overdose of insulin. The Sammy Jankis story, Teddy tells Leonard, is a screen or blind Leonard has built through repetition, through conditioning, in order to hide the truth. Leonard thus has come to believe he didn't kill his wife. She was killed by John G. And since pursuing his wife's killer gives his life focus, purpose, and meaning, Leonard—Teddy claims—doesn't want the pursuit to end. According to Teddy, in fact, Leonard has found ways to thwart his own investigation in order "to create a puzzle [Leonard can] never solve." He has removed pages, for example, from the police file Teddy gave him to use as a resource in his quest for his wife's killer. He has blacked out further bits of information in the report.

As Teddy has it, the two of them—he and Leonard—have already worked through at least two cycles of tracking down and killing Leonard's wife's murderer. "Look, Lenny," Teddy says during this confrontation, "I was the cop assigned to your wife's case. I believed you. I thought you deserved a chance for revenge. I'm the one who helped you find the other guy in your bathroom that night, the guy that cracked your skull and fucked your wife. We found him. You killed him. But you didn't

remember. So I helped you start looking again, looking for the guy you already killed." Since that time, Teddy suggests, he has been using Leonard's commitment to vengeance and inability to hold onto new information as a means of turning a quick buck: Teddy locates a drug dealer with the same initials as the killer Leonard seeks, puts Leonard onto the trail of the dealer while at the same time arranging with the dealer for a transaction. The dealer brings the cash, Leonard kills the dealer thinking he is John G., and Teddy swoops in later to help clean up and to pocket the proceeds. Teddy provides documentary evidence of the first killing in the form of a blood smeared Polaroid of a beaming, bloody Leonard pointing to the spot on his chest where he will place the tattoo announcing his accomplishment. Much of the plot of *Memento* is taken up unfolding one iteration of the drug dealer scenario, in which Teddy manipulates Leonard into thinking a midlevel dealer named Jimmy Grantz (Larry Holden) is John G. But the time period between the "incident" that destroyed Leonard's mind and the present action of the film is studiedly indeterminate and Teddy hints at other killings: "I should kill *you*," Leonard observes near the end of Teddy's series of revelations—to which Teddy jovially responds, "You're not a killer." Then, while playfully pinching Leonard's cheeks, as though Leonard were a favored nephew: "That's why you're so good at it." Clearly, this little game of hide-and-seek (and find-and-kill) is for Teddy and Leonard a practiced bit of business.

Most scholarship on *Memento* assumes, or actively makes the case, that we need to take Teddy's comments during this revelation scene with more than just a few grains of salt. As William G. Little has put it, Leonard's "lengthy exchange with Teddy is so heavy with layers of possible fabrication as to make it impossible to know the truth"[11]—a position anticipated or echoed by nearly everyone who has written about the film.

This consensus position turns mainly on two points: first, that Teddy can't be trusted because we frequently see him lying to and manipulating Leonard; and, second, that Teddy's account is overcomplicated and leaves crucial questions unanswered. Andrew Kania, directly addressing this second concern, puts it as follows: "Even if Leonard is repressing memories as a result of unintentionally killing his wife with an insulin overdose, he must have had some memory problems already, to explain the accidental killing. But then it's not clear how he could feel guilty enough about killing his wife to trigger his radical repression, since he would not realize he had done it, nor remember it for long if someone told him."[12]

The first objection to Teddy's revisionary account of Leonard's experience is based on an assumption, or series of assumptions, that the movie doesn't really share: that people are consistent, simple, and relatively easy to read. Teddy often comes across as a weasel, so he is, the skeptical thinking goes, uniformly a weasel. But there's a difference between the complex and the indeterminate. Teddy is the former, not the latter; he is readable—that is, knowable—but not easily so. What *Memento* does is challenge the viewer to register, to somehow comprehend, the complexity of this character, this man who does lie and use Leonard but who nonetheless believes in treating Leonard, in a sense, fairly; who genuinely likes Leonard and in a very meaningful sense works on Leonard's behalf; who, at some level has Leonard's best interests at heart and who believes (perhaps self-servingly) that he is making sacrifices to further Leonard's cause.

All of this is implicit in Teddy's interactions with Leonard throughout the film. But all of it, too, is palpably present in the revelation scene itself—not just in what Teddy says, but in how he says it. It's there to be read from Pantoliano's performance. It's in the warmth with which Teddy recalls Leonard's happiness when the two of them tracked down and killed the first John G. "I took that picture," he says to Lenny, who is looking at the bloody Polaroid of his post-murder ebullient self. "Just when you did it. Look how happy you are." It's in the genuine—and quite understandable—sense of frustration Teddy expresses when he explains how Leonard forgot that killing. It's in the anger suffusing Teddy's response to Leonard's sarcastic dismissal of Teddy's expressions of concern for Leonard: "Fuck YOU," he shouts. "I gave you a reason to live. And you were more than happy to help. You don't want the truth. You make up your own truth. … All you do is moan! I'm the one that has to live with what you've done. I'm the one that put it all together. You, you wander around. You're playing detective. You're living a dream kid: a dead wife to pine for; a sense of purpose to your life; a romantic quest you wouldn't end even if I wasn't in the picture."[13]

Teddy gains nothing by lying here. And everything he says in this concluding conversation comes across as utterly sincere. More importantly, all of it dovetails remarkably precisely with everything we see prior to the conversation. To use Nolan's own words, the narrative "snap[s] together at the end."[14] Throughout *Memento*, for example, we see signs of Leonard's willingness to doctor the evidentiary record, mostly in the form of suppressing information, an idea conveyed mainly in what I'll call a motif of "crossing out." That is, at a number of points, we see bits of text that have

been scribbled out, effectively erased by being inked over but leaving traces of the emendation. The Polaroid of Natalie, to take the first instance, contains a line completely scratched out. The note he writes for Fact 5 starts out as "Access to Drugs," but Leonard crosses that out during a phone conversation with Teddy and changes it to "Drug Dealer." Most importantly, the police file Leonard uses as a major resource in his investigation is not only missing twelve pages but is only partially legible, much of it having been crossed out—so that, as we see Leonard pore through it, the report looks like a redacted CIA document prepared for the press (Image 8.1).

The same impulse that produces the crossing out also surely produces Leonard's knowledge that the only way to destroy Polaroids is to "burn them." "You have to burn them," he tells Natalie as she tries to tear up the photo of Dodd. Leonard is right of course. Polaroids are hard to rip up. But how does he know this? His recourse to instant photos as memory aids postdates his injury so he had to learn this fact after the "incident." But given his condition, the only way he could have learned that Polaroids must be burned to be gotten rid of would have been by destroying, or trying to destroy, countless pictures (and by somehow translating intuition into knowledge). The implication is quite clear: by the time we see him Leonard has become adept at shaping his "memories."

Leonard also manifests throughout—mostly in the subtlety of Guy Pierce's performance—a steady resistance to certain forms of awareness, a refusal fully to look inward. After Natalie goads Leonard into beating her,

Image 8.1 The motif of crossing out

for example, she returns to prod him into going after Dodd, whom she blames for her bruises and bloody lip—Leonard having already forgotten that he is the one responsible for her injuries. As they talk, Lenny makes a fist, flexes the hand with which he struck her. And there's this sense of recognition evoked by the gesture and the expression on his face, a hint of awareness of some connection to be made—hovering at the edges of the scene, as it were—between his pain and Natalie's, his hand and her face (Image 8.2).

But Leonard pointedly refuses to think about the connection, dismissing the inchoate understanding with a shake of the head. Similarly, just before Leonard and Teddy reenter the derelict building where Jimmy Grantz was killed (and where Teddy himself will shortly be murdered), Leonard looks inside the truck he originally drove to the scene. He finds on the seat the bullets he had previously discharged from the weapon he'd taken from Jimmy and as he slowly fingers them, there is, again, a faint sense of recognition registered by the hand gesture, the slow toying with the bullets, letting them dribble through his fingers like grains of sand, and by the slight inwardness of his expression. Again with a jolt, he moves on: "Let's take a look inside," he says, smiling, as he slams the door of the truck.

Most importantly, of course, the sort of waving away of knowledge referred to here occurs just before Leonard shoots Teddy at the opening of the discourse (*syuzhet*) and the closing of the story (*fabula*). After being pistol-whipped by Leonard and dragged deeper into the derelict building

Image 8.2 Leonard at the borders of awareness

where Jimmy Grantz died, Teddy tries to prod Leonard toward self-reflection in order to forestall Leonard's murderous intent. "Leonard, you don't know what's going on," Teddy explains. "You wanna know, Lenny. Come on. Come on. Let's go down in the basement. Let's go down, you and me together." While Teddy is saying this, Leonard is looking off-screen, contemplatively. He's thinking—and what we clearly see him registering is the truth in what Teddy is telling him. "Then you'll know," Teddy continues, "who you really are." Leonard keeps looking away, looking inward. There's a sense of hanging action, something pending. Then the expression on Leonard's face suddenly shifts, becoming a kind of blank mask as he turns to look at Teddy, who clearly realizes that Leonard, unable to face the truth, is going to kill him. He lurches away, screaming "No!" as Leonard pulls the trigger.

Just as Leonard has a capacity for willed blindness, as Teddy's reading of him at the end of the film suggests, he also has a kind of talent for self-manipulation, a point first made clear in the scene with the escort, whom Leonard has hired to, in a sense, impersonate his wife. The scenario is simple enough: he places a few of his wife's belongings around his motel room bed; he and the escort get into the bed, where he will fall asleep, the escort serving to warm the spot next to him; the escort will then get up, go to the bathroom and slam the door, thus waking Leonard.

Leonard's motivations for producing this bit of theater are complicated, conflicted, dense with meaning. But for my purposes, what the scene mainly does is demonstrate Leonard's readiness to exploit his own disability, a point Nolan underscores expressly on a number of occasions:

> That was a scene I was always prepared to defend, because I always assumed that someone would try to make me cut it out, because… it doesn't necessarily relate that much to the story. To me, it's the first moment in the film that we're given a strong indication that Leonard understands how to manipulate himself. Essentially, it provides a small model of what the entire film comes to represent, which is that on some level he is aware of the fact that he can … "communicate with his future self."[15]

Nolan was at pains, in short, to prepare the viewer for the film's climax and conclusion, when Teddy confronts Leonard with the reality of his situation and Leonard reacts by setting up his future self to go after Teddy.

Everything in that scene not only echoes all of the features I have been discussing here but also serves to confirm the view of Leonard that Teddy

has just put before us. We see the same willingness to edit the historical record, to expunge information that might tie him to the reality of his past, when he burns two Polaroids that link him to a self he now wants to disown: the photo Teddy took after Leonard killed the first John G. and the photo Leonard himself recently shot of Jimmy lying dead on the floor of the derelict building. We see the same capacity for self-deception, for manipulating his future self, when he constructs evidence that will later lead him to see Teddy as John G. We see the same habit of self-justification, rationalization, and denial that, in retrospect, it is clear we have been seeing throughout: at the very moment Leonard is—quite consciously—laying out a scheme to set himself up to murder Teddy, he is saying to himself, "I'm not a killer. I'm just someone who wanted to make things right."

Thus, to the second objection raised in relation to taking Teddy's account as the truth, I would say only that this is just how we are given to understand the functioning of "the complex economy of Leonard's dysfunctional mental life," to use Kania's own phrase (170). Leonard clearly suffers from some form of trauma—at least partly physiological—that is related to the attack on him and his wife and that prevents him from making new memories the way most people do. He isn't—at least not in any simple sense—faking his disability. That disability has, however, left him able to acquire new knowledge; and we see any number of instances where Leonard demonstrates capacities he could only have acquired after his injury: he knows, for example, that he has frequently to check his pockets to access the information stored on the cards and Polaroids stowed there; without even thinking about what he's doing, Leonard knows how to give himself a tattoo using a sewing needle and a Bic pen; he has learned how to read other people's responses—puzzlement, curiosity, disappointment—to the various symptoms of his illness; and he knows that the only way to destroy a Polaroid is to burn it. These instances of learning, we are made to understand, are achieved by means of conditioning, rote repetition, a form of knowledge acquisition that is related to instinct or intuition and that gets processed by parts of the brain different from those associated with standard memory.

But Leonard also has forms of awareness about his past and present that aren't characteristic of those who suffer from anterograde amnesia. All of the evasions, manipulations, and hesitancies discussed previously testify to that awareness, those hazily defined forms of knowledge. So in addition to the specific trauma that Leonard suffers from, Leonard also has psychological problems that prevent him from dealing meaningfully with a past

that he both does and does not remember. His is, one might say, a complicated case.

But it is not a case, I have been trying to demonstrate, that remains largely undeterminable. While there surely are a few details of this story, as I noted previously, that never get filled in, almost all of what we see does get explained and accounted for. That sense of closure is not simply, I suggest, a pleasure the narrative provides but a central aim of the movie. Proffering a revised view of what we've seen—of what we've all along thought we were seeing—is what *Memento* is all about.

The aims of the conceptual undertow, this constant pressure to move back and away from the flow of the narration are, I think, manifold. At the most basic level, the point is simply to wake the viewer up: hence the motif, echoing throughout the narrative, of awakening. "It's like waking up," Leonard says to Burt, trying to convey the feel of his condition. And we see him awaken a half dozen times over the course of the movie. But while Leonard is constantly coming into consciousness in a physical sense, he never really does wake up. The viewer is supposed to. The reverse chronology is designed to help make that happen. Because the sense of things isn't given to us, because we are continuously having to piece the meaning together, because we are perpetually returning to events we've seen to reconsider their import, we have to pay attention; we are forced, in the words of that initial voice over in *The Prestige*, to "watch closely." Effectively, we learn how to watch the movie *while* we watch the movie—with *Memento* serving to prod us toward more careful observation and thus sharpen our analytical skills.

Second, as the preceding discussion implies, the retrospective nature of the viewer's experience (the casting back, the constant piecing together of bits of information) necessarily leads, as Noël Carroll has pointed out, to a form of self-consciousness about that experience that has the capacity to be instructive:

> By telling the story backward, *Memento* forces the audience to make sense of the narrative with heightened self-awareness. The process of following the story becomes conscious and deliberate. We have to think overtly about what we are doing. We have to construct the story and, while we are putting it together, we need to stand back, figuratively speaking, to make sure we are tying up the loose ends. That is, we have to observe ourselves assembling the events of Leonard's life into a coherent story. And in the course of self-consciously configuring the narrative in this way, the reflective viewer ideally

> will arrive at certain discoveries *about* narrative and narrative comprehension.[16]

Watching *Memento*, in other words, works to sensitize us to the processes of meaning construction involved whenever we sit down to take in a movie.

But the kind of self-consciousness about meaning-making that Carroll is referring to here will be produced by any film that finds a means of focusing on the issue of interpretation—open-ended art films like *Last Year at Marienbad*, for example. Here, I think, there is something more specific going on—an aim more particular to the reverse chronology of Nolan's film and the kinds of attention it requires. So, third, I want to suggest that *Memento*, by asking us to reflect on the choices we have already made, the meanings we have already constructed, the evaluations we have already committed to, prods us toward a critical self-scrutiny that affords the opportunity of gaining better *self*-understanding.

Let us return to Teddy, by way of example. Over the course of the film's development, we are constantly put in the position of reevaluating his character, of negotiating and renegotiating our basic sense of who he is. At the outset, of course, we see him only as victim, as the man Leonard shoots in the film's reverse running opening sequence. But the sympathy we extend to him as anonymous victim carries over into the first full scene of the movie: introducing himself with an exuberant "LENNY!" Teddy comes across in his early exchanges with Leonard as an engaging rogue, a little slippery perhaps but not unlikable. He's smart, quick-witted, and he gets the movie's best lines: "What are you, Pocahontas?" he asks after Leonard comments that the tracks left by the truck they are passing can't be more than "three days old." "You know," he remarks to Leonard in ironic deadpan at another point, when Leonard has forgotten why he summoned Teddy: "I've had more rewarding friendships." But once the evidence Leonard has planted pointing to Teddy as killer starts to accumulate, it's hard not to see him simply as liar and arch-manipulator, the film's antagonist. "Don't believe his lies," Leonard's Polaroid of Teddy instructs. And everything that Teddy says subsequently seems suspect. By the end of the film, however, once we have heard Teddy's account of his history with Leonard and once we have seen Leonard's hostile reaction, we have to rethink our relation to Teddy, which becomes, as a consequence, significantly more complex, as does the character.

To be sure, Teddy does manipulate Leonard; he subtly—and sometimes not so subtly—pokes fun at Leonard's disabilities. He is not above

bullying and exploiting Leonard. But he also cares about him—a point Pantoliano makes clear in the context of explaining why Teddy doesn't simply rob Leonard:

> The whole point of the movie for Teddy is that I need to get that car [the Jaguar Leonard appropriates from Jimmy]. I need to get that car and I need to get the [two hundred thousand dollars] out of the trunk of the car. Leonard doesn't remember that the gun and the money is [sic] in the trunk of the car. And I used to ask Chris, "Why don't I just, in an off-camera moment, when he's sleeping in his motel room, just go steal the car?" And he said, "Nah. Teddy would never do that to Leonard. He liked him too much."[17]

And it's clear from the details of Pantoliano's performance—if we're attending to them—that Teddy *is* fond of Leonard. Through all of their interactions, Teddy maintains a manner of ironic amiability that signals both pity (stemming from his awareness of Leonard's significant limitations) and affection (stemming from his belief that Leonard is at base a nice guy). He frequently expresses sympathy for Leonard's situation, helps extract Leonard from at least one seriously sticky situation (finding Dodd in the bedroom closet), and offers sage counsel, not just in cases like the above concerning the practical problems Leonard may encounter if he stays in the area, but in contexts that engage more global concerns:

Teddy: You don't have a clue, do you? You don't even know who you are.

Lenny: Yes, I do. I don't have amnesia. I remember everything right up until the incident. I'm Leonard Shelby. I'm from San Francisco.

Teddy: That's who you were. You do not know who you are, what you've become since. … the incident. You wander around playing detective. You don't even know how long ago it was. Let me put it this way. Were you wearing designer suits when you sold insurance?

Lenny: I didn't sell insurance. [Over the first part of Teddy's comment below] I was an investigator.

Teddy: Right. Right. You're an investigator. Well maybe you should start investigating yourself.

The call to introspection that Teddy offers here—which, again, I see as central to the concerns of the film as a whole—is a persistent feature of his intercourse with Leonard. And Leonard would do well to heed the call. For Leonard, self-examination is anathema, since it would necessarily unwind the structure that is holding his life together. But the life he has is built on bad faith and he'd be better off without it. That Teddy is willing—even eager—to goad Leonard into self-investigation, though it might lead to a renunciation of the self-delusions that make Teddy's manipulation of Leonard possible—marks a complexity of characterization that pushes against viewer complacency. Reading Teddy—comprehending him—is a challenge. And we can get him whole only by modifying without fully rejecting prior interpretations—that is, by a synthetic process of review and revision that asks us to reflect upon our tendencies to simplify, to label, to jump to easy conclusions. *Memento*, by means of its structure, is designed to encourage that kind of multidirectional analysis.

We see the process at play even more clearly in relation to Natalie—a character for whom we need to make more extensive modifications as a consequence of rereading and who is sufficiently complex that she has been pretty systematically misread. Nearly everyone, that is, who discusses this character sees her as deceptive, deceitful, and dangerous—a classic femme fatale.[18] Little, for example, calls her "a clearly untrustworthy figure in the film" (74). Adrian Gargett sees her as "exploiting mercilessly Leonard's condition for her own ends."[19] Andrew Spicer, who characterizes Natalie as "the ostensibly sympathetic but hard and ruthless femme fatale," is so bent on finding fault with her that he misconstrues and misrepresents basic features of her story, suggesting at one point that Natalie "manipulate[s]" Leonard "so that she might benefit from a lucrative drug deal,"[20] a claim for which there is precisely zero supporting evidence. Natalie isn't out for the money. Nor is she out for revenge, though a number of critics have argued that she, in George Bragues's formulation of the point, "befriends [Leonard] and uses him to retaliate against Teddy by handing him automobile registration documents matching the license plate number tattooed on his thigh."[21] Careful examination of the film makes it clear that Natalie doesn't know that the John Edward Gammell she fingers for the murder of Leonard's wife is the "Teddy" involved in her boyfriend's disappearance.

The basic reason for the kind of misunderstanding outlined here becomes clear if we attend to the language of revealed deceptiveness used to characterize the presentation of Natalie's character. Most of the critics

who see Natalie as problematic—which is to say, again, almost all of those who evaluate the character—present her as at first seeming to be nice, then revealing herself to be a self-serving schemer. Spicer casts her as "*ostensibly* sympathetic" (59, my italics). Deborah Knight and George McKnight note that "like most noir femmes, Natalie initially *appears* to be sympathetic and innocent."[22] The logic is as follows: when we first see Natalie, she comes across as genuinely interested in Leonard—as fond of him and as aligned with his cause: She passes him the DMV documents that identify John Gammell as the man he is looking for. She prompts him to talk about his wife, because, as she puts it, Leonard "like[s] to remember her." She expresses a sense of identification with, and sympathy for, Leonard.

In the following two scenes involving Natalie, our initial impressions seem to be confirmed. In the first, she calms Leonard, explaining how he has helped her with a problem. She again treats him kindly, relating to his sense of loss: "I've lost somebody too," she says. She gently seduces him and in the morning arranges to help him with his quest, not because she is after anything but because he has helped her. In the second, she comes across to both Leonard and the viewer as innocent victim, a woman who has gotten into serious trouble as a consequence of Leonard's actions. She is beaten, bloody, and frightened. We are encouraged—by her seeming fragility and vulnerability, by her confusion and fear, by the sense we get that Leonard has somehow gotten her in over her head—to want to see her protected. And we can't help but feel reassured when Leonard—in knight-in-shining-armor fashion—takes up her cause.

After this scene, however, the presentation of Natalie's character shifts. She arrives home, where Leonard has been waiting. Once she has removed anything Leonard might write with, she begins to taunt and humiliate him. She is pointedly, purposefully brutal, calling Leonard harsh names and impugning the character of his wife. She says that she's going to use him and that she's going to enjoy using him all the more as a result of having first told him about it. She knows he won't remember. "You sad, sad freak," she whispers in his ear as she circles him. "I can say whatever the fuck I want. And you won't remember. We'll still be best friends. Or maybe even lovers." Since we've just seen the two of them in bed together, the line seems designed to unravel our sense of that earlier scene—designed, that is, to undermine our faith in Natalie. And our suspicions seem to be confirmed when she provokes Leonard into hitting her, then exits the house to wait in her car while Leonard's sense of what just happened evaporates. The camera cuts from Leonard, in the foreground,

desperately searching for a pen (which, like everything else, we read backward to Natalie's hiding of the pens, an act we are now in a position to "place" as a mark of her deviousness) to Natalie, smugly sitting in her car in the driveway, waiting. Natalie then returns, reintroducing the scene we had been invited earlier to think of as being about her victimization, a victimization we now realize was entirely staged by Natalie herself. And from this point onward, she grows increasingly hostile. Given what we know and the way what we know has been unfolded to us, it is very difficult to see Natalie, by the end of the film, in any guise other than that of femme fatale.

What's missing, however, from this account of the character—what viewers almost certainly miss their first time through, what the critics cited above fail, quite surprisingly I think, to register at all—is that the arc of Natalie's character is playing out for us in reverse order. If we stop to consider—as surely we're meant to do—how her actions would look if we watched them unfold chronologically, we would see that, while she is initially wary of Leonard and responds to his intrusion into her life with a measure of hostility (understandable enough given the circumstances surrounding their first encounter, about which more momentarily), she grows increasingly sympathetic to Leonard and becomes increasingly invested in helping him in his quest. The trajectory of her character development, in other words, is the exact reverse of what it appears to be on first viewing. Natalie isn't gradually revealed to be conniving, manipulative, and dangerous; over time, she in fact reveals herself to be surprisingly empathetic and, again given the circumstances, almost shockingly decent.

The point is worth tracking in detail—at least in part because it has been so systematically elided from the critical commentary on the film. Leonard is led to Ferdy's bar by a note in the pocket of the jacket he is wearing that tells him to "come by after" to meet Natalie. What *she* sees, when Leonard first arrives in the parking lot, is an utter stranger driving her boyfriend's car and, more improbably still, wearing her boyfriend's clothes. Jimmy's line of work, she knows, entails affiliation with rough men; and nothing about Leonard's initial appearance bodes well. Her caginess and hostility make perfect sense. She's worried about Jimmy's disappearance and she's angered by the nonchalance with which Leonard has appropriated Jimmy's identity. After determining, however, that Leonard is the "memory man" Jimmy at some point mentioned—and not the Teddy who set up the drug deal from which Jimmy never returned—Natalie stops worrying about Leonard and focuses her attention on evading the threat posed by Dodd, Jimmy's drug dealing associate. She uses Leonard and his disability to rid herself of that menace; and while it is clear that she would be willing to

maneuver Leonard into killing Dodd, it is important to recognize that getting Dodd killed may be her only way of avoiding being killed *by* him.

Once that threat has been eliminated, Natalie's relation to Leonard dramatically shifts. When Leonard returns to Natalie's house after chasing Dodd out of town, he's confused and agitated. He doesn't know who Dodd is or why he, Leonard, ended up beating Dodd. He's worried that his disabilities will make him an easy mark for manipulation and expresses concern that "someone's fucking with [him], trying to get [him] to kill the wrong guy"—a line saturated with irony, layered with meaning, since it seems in the next (reverse) sequence to point to Natalie as the wizard behind the screen but is finally shown to refer to Leonard himself, who is, as it turns out, the "someone" who is "fucking with" him and trying to get him to kill the wrong guy. Natalie, working to comfort him, reaches out, holds his shoulders, helps him remove his jacket. Discovering his tattoos, she unbuttons his shirt, then leads him to a mirror so she can read the backward-written line running across the top of his chest. She moves behind him, both of them facing the mirror, and the camera for a moment links the two characters, marking them as in some sense mirror images of one another: they stand together, one behind the other, both facing the mirror, which is out of frame. Both are wounded, a little beat up, with abrasions on the same cheek (Image 8.3). In a sense, they pose for us for a moment, marking for the viewer their similarity—marking for one

Image 8.3 Leonard and Natalie as doubles

another as they look into the mirror their interconnectedness. Throughout the scene, Natalie and Leonard are in continuous physical contact and at its conclusion, she makes the connections between them explicit by noting, "I've lost somebody too." She then offers to help Leonard find John G.

The next shot shows Leonard and Natalie in bed together, the ellipsis suggesting, in an old-fashioned gesture appropriate to the tradition out of which *Memento* arises, that they have had sex. Natalie is curled up next to Leonard, her head on his chest, as he talks about his wife, expressing his perplexing and inescapable grief. And it's clear that Natalie is moved by what Leonard says, relates to it, relates to *him* as someone, like her, who has "lost somebody": when Leonard, thinking that Natalie is asleep, extricates himself from her embrace in order to explore her house, she replicates the gesture Leonard remembers having made the night his wife was attacked, the gesture he restages whenever he seeks to recall the feel of her still alive. Once Leonard is gone from the room, Natalie reaches over to the place where he was lying, feeling the warmth there, clearly thinking of Jimmy and her own loss, a point Nolan underscores by cutting together her gesture and a shot of Leonard looking at a photo of Jimmy and Natalie together, an almost iconic—or, say, advertising style—image of a happy couple. As she lies in bed, engaging her own grief, Leonard writes, on the back lower border of the Polaroid he earlier took of Natalie, "She has also lost someone. She will help you out of pity."

Everyone who has anything to say about Natalie in the extant criticism of the film sees Leonard as grievously mistaking her character in this summary evaluation. They see him as making a mistake in crossing out the warning ("Don't trust her") that Teddy initially had him write on the Polaroid. But the second legend is, in fact, accurate. And the next morning, after Leonard and Natalie wake, she seeks to impose herself somehow on his shattered mind. After an exchange in which Natalie explains that she is helping Leonard, not out of any self-interest, but "because [he] helped [her]" (a point she reiterates when they later meet up at the diner and she passes him the information on Teddy), Natalie asks, "So, the next time you see me, will you remember me?" Leonard shakes his head. She pulls his face down to hers, kisses him softly while staring intently into his open eyes, whispering, "I think you will."

The next time they meet, for an appointment at a diner, she is clearly perturbed that he doesn't remember her. Here we are near the beginning of the movie but the end of their involvement. Leonard blithely walks past Natalie and she is forced to reel him in. She's curt, a little sarcastic, her manner indicative of the frustration she feels from having failed, as another character at one point puts it, to "make an impression." Leonard clearly senses both the frustration and its cause: "Look, I'm sorry I don't remember you," he finally offers, as a way, surely, of putting a period to the uncomfortable exchange. "It's nothing personal." There's a quick cut to an insert of Natalie's fingers fiddling with the flatware on the dinner table. She's negotiating her feelings, working through her disappointment. When the film cuts from the insert back to Natalie, she has made her decision to side with Leonard, to "help him out of pity": "I do have information for you," she says, her tone now more matter-of-fact. But as she's getting ready to pass Leonard a copy of Teddy's license and registration—"photo and all," as she puts it—she hesitates: "are you sure you want this?" she asks, looking at Leonard searchingly. She tells him that he won't remember getting revenge, that he "won't even know it happened." Effectively, she's trying to wave him away from an endeavor that to her appears futile and emptily destructive. Obviously enough, she has no reason to make this point aside from her concern for Leonard. Pushing him to self-scrutiny can in no way further her interest. She then asks him to talk about his wife—primarily because his doing so brings the two of them in contact at the point of their mutual suffering, their need to recall those they have lost. They share this moment of his remembering. When he asks whether he owes her anything, she insists, a smile playing lightly on her face, that she "wasn't helping [him] for money." He apologizes. "It's okay," she says, smiling more broadly—a warm playfulness breaking out: "See, you have this … condition." And again, as before, she draws a connection between the two of them. "You know what we have in common?" she asks. "We are both survivors."

Read backward, as it is presented in the film, this is a story of feigned fellowship, of manipulation, of revealed hostility. Read chronologically, however, the arc of Natalie's interactions with Leonard forms a narrative of growing concern and intimacy. Rather than being the most duplicitous of the film's characters, she is in fact its most admirable. Early on, she

exploits Leonard out of desperation, but then gradually comes to care for and about him. And she tries to help him as best she can in the way he seems to want to be helped. The point *seems* sufficiently obvious—all one has to do, after all, to get to it is reverse the order of the scenes as presented, a gesture one is forced to make in any case to make even the most basic sense of the film—that the persistent misreading of Natalie strikes at some level as shocking. How could it be that she is so regularly read wrong?

What I want to suggest is that the misconstrual of the trajectory of her development is—at some level, as a stage, as it were, in a projected process—an intended effect, a result of the film's structural complexity combined with the use it makes of the iconography of film noir. About the first of these elements—*Memento*'s demanding structure—nothing further needs to be said at this point: the movie's intertwining of backward and forward moving sequences makes reading any aspect of the film a challenge. In the case of Natalie, however, that challenge gets magnified by the ways the film works its noir tropes and motifs, the way it exploits viewer habits of response to genre conventions.

That *Memento* situates itself within the tradition of film noir is, of course, fairly obvious. Amorphous urban landscape? Check. Convoluted plot revolving around murder and betrayal? Check. Idealistic detective figure pursuing truth and justice? Check. Pervasive sense of fatedness? Voice-over narration? Past traumas impinging on present activities? Check, check, and check. Nolan has, in fact, explicitly identified *Memento* as an attempt at an "update" of noir conventions.[23] And many critics note the connections between text and type. Knight and McKnight, for example, devote their essay to an exploration of the noir and neo-noir "features" of Nolan's film. Several articles examine its relation to cinematic and literary representations of the hard-boiled detective.[24] And both Mottram and Spicer discuss parallels between *Memento* and the iconic neo-noir *Point Blank* (1967).

The palpable use *Memento* makes of noir formulas sets the viewer up to look for a femme fatale. When Natalie sidles up to Leonard to ask him to kill Dodd for her, when she calls him a "pathetic piece of shit," a "fucking retard," refers to his "cunt of a fucking wife," when she whispers to Leonard "I'm gonna use you.. . I'm telling you now, because I'm gonna enjoy it so much more if I know that you could stop me if you weren't such a fucking freak"—well, we seem to have found her. *Memento* effectively *frames* Natalie (in a couple different senses of the word) as femme fatale: it's as if, two-thirds of the way into the movie, we feel we have the

puzzle all but solved but something is still missing; then Natalie hides all of Leonard's pens and the last piece seems to snap into place. "Oh, I see," we might be thinking to ourselves as she sits in her car smirking, waiting for poor Leonard's memory to fail. "She's the Phyllis Dietrichson to his Walter Neff, the Cora Smith to his Frank Chambers." *Memento leads* us (by means of its generic positioning) to these conclusions.

The problem, of course, as I've been arguing, is that Natalie isn't really a femme fatale.[25] Thus her presentation is not just a provocation and a challenge (the way Teddy's is) but a trap, one *Memento* sets for us then reveals *to* us so that—as we sit taking stock at the end of the movie, as we move backward through what we have seen, piecing it together again, rereading the film in our minds if not in fact—we are pushed, by our belated recognition of our mistakes, to examine critically our reading practices, our habits of mind, our beliefs and values. Walking us into a blind, *Memento* then effectively turns us around and asks us to consider how we got there—thus prodding us toward a form of self-reflection.[26] This, I think, is the general aim of the movie. It is certainly the point of its presentation of its main character, to whom I want to turn again now.

* * *

Through nearly the whole of *Memento*, I had been saying, we are led to identify and sympathize with Leonard Shelby. In the film's closing moments, in a flash, we discover that this character—whom we have come to like, whom we see as being, in some sense, despite the extremity of his disability, like us—is a kind of moral monster, a man capable of horrifying criminality. But it is not simply that we are required here to revise our view of the character (although that is surely true); it is that, just as is the case with Natalie, we are also obligated—as we scan backward into the narrative—to consider how we could have missed what is now presented to us, since it was always there before. It is as if we have been subjected to a bit of sleight of hand, a bit of misdirection, and are now being asked to think about what it was that pulled our attention away from the transformation that was happening in plain sight.

What principally serves to beguile us, I think, over the first nine tenths of the movie, so that we fail to see the serial killer sitting there before us, is an intriguing updating of an image of heroic masculinity that is deeply embedded in the cultural unconscious and familiar from American popular film, particularly the Western and—more to the point here—film noir.

What we see in Leonard, in other words, and in the conflicts and contradictions of his character as initially laid out—in his woundedness, his capacity for feeling, his idealism, his sense of honor and commitment, on the one hand, and his toughness, his charm and charisma, his fearlessness, his physical competence, his brutality and moral myopia, on the other—is a version of the image of masculinity most consistently embodied by Humphrey Bogart, in characters like Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, and Rick Blaine, but that is also clearly part of the character construction of figures as diverse as Shane and Jeff Bailey and still present in Jason Bourne and the Daniel Craig version of Bond. Tough on the outside, soft in the center: a tenuous accommodation, in the earlier incarnations, of competing and conflicted fantasies, has become, over time, increasingly difficult to sustain, so that we can imagine the reconciliation only in the form of mental illness, or as the result of trauma.

In most cases—with Bourne or Bond or Bryan Mills or Maximus—the figure continues to be romanticized. At the concluding turn of *Memento*, however, we are forced both to see the sociopathy underlying the conflicts and to own our allegiance to the image. We have, if we are being honest with ourselves, pitied Leonard, bonded with him, been seduced by him. My sense is that most viewers continue to like him even after discovering he makes the meaning of his life out of murder. As he drives off at the end in his new Jaguar convertible, sporting his new threads and clutching the note containing Fact 6 that seals Teddy's doom, we are returned briefly to seeing the world through Leonard's eyes. We look with him at the city street sliding by, the road we are on sweeping up underneath us as we pass. The film cuts to a brief shot of Leonard as he begins the soliloquy that will end the movie, then cuts to a close-up of his hand on the steering wheel of the Jag and the familiar tattoo on that hand, "Remember Sammy Jankis," reminding Leonard to keep creating the fictions that will allow him to ignore the reality of his existence. "I have to believe in a world outside my own mind," he says to himself. "I have to believe that my actions still have meaning even if I can't remember them. I have to believe that when my eyes are closed" and he closes his eyes as he drives, "the world's still there." But what he sees, and we see with him, is pure fantasy, an image of him in the present, with his spiky blonde hair and multiple "freaky tattoos," lying in bed with a still living wife who is looking up at him lovingly, admiringly, as she caresses a tattoo on his chest reading "I've done it," which covers the spot he formerly left open for just such a message and purpose. It is, of course, an impossible dream. But what Leonard

is saying is so moving that we want to disregard the bad faith involved in its production. Sharing his desire and need for meaning, we want to forgive—and to forget. We want, again, to be with Leonard, to bridge the gulf between us that Teddy's revelation has created.

And in some sense we ought at this precise point, as I have been trying to suggest, to be looking closely at Leonard in relation to ourselves. "We all need mirrors to remind ourselves who we are," he says to himself moments before *Memento* fades to black. And the film cuts briefly to a shot of the storefront windows, brightly reflecting the world Leonard is now passing through, and serving as a final reminder of all the many mirrors that have figured in the film as images of self-reflection and introspection: the oak framed mirror in room 21 of the Discount Inn that the film scans past in its opening black-and-white segment; the similar, but not identical mirror in the extra, mirroring room Leonard rents at the same hotel and that we see in one of the film's opening color sequences; the mirror in the bathroom of the diner where Natalie passes Leonard the DMV information on Teddy, a mirror we see—like so much else in the movie—multiple times in mirroring shot sequences; the mirror in Natalie's bedroom in front of which she fixes her hair after spending the night with Leonard; the mirror in her living room to which she pulls Leonard in order to read his mirror-written tattoo reading "JOHN G. RAPED AND MURDERED MY WIFE"; the mirror in the Shelby bedroom that Leonard passes on his way to try to save his wife from the assault taking place in their bathroom; and the mirror in that bathroom itself, against which Leonard's head is smashed, shattering the glass and fragmenting Leonard's identity.

All these mirrors—echoed in *Memento*'s obsessive, mirroring reiterations (the identical shots that open and close the backward moving color sequences; the precise repetition of camera setup and car movement in the two arrival sequences, one in black-and-white, the other in color, at the derelict building where Jimmy and Teddy are killed); echoed as well in a host of mirror-like objects (the windshield of a car, the panes of glass in a kitchen window, the lines of curtained windows fronting the walkways of nondescript motels) that serve to set up the shot of the storefront windows with which the movie concludes—urge us to see connections, to see ourselves in what we are watching.

One mirroring moment is of central importance in this regard: in an early black-and-white sequence of the film, Leonard is on the phone with an unidentified interlocutor (whom we eventually come to understand to

be Teddy). He is recalling/constructing/rehearsing the story of his first meetings with Sammy Jankis. While Leonard is talking, we watch him arrive at the Jankis's front door. We see and hear Leonard knock on one of the panes of glass and Sammy rises to answer. The film then cuts, in a form of reverse shot, to a position outside the door: we now watch through the glass as Sammy approaches. The shot is very tight on the door, with Leonard out of frame. What we are in fact looking at is Leonard's reflection in a few of the panes of glass, his image broken up by the wooden pane dividers (a brief foreshadowing of his image fracturing in the bathroom mirror of his home as his head is slammed into the glass). Still in close up, we see Sammy arrive, his face briefly occupying the same space as Leonard's reflection, so that we see, again very briefly, the faint image of Leonard's face superimposed on Sammy's face, thus identifying the two of them. Just as this is happening, we hear the word "recognition" in Leonard's voice-over.

On the simplest level, the shot of overlapping facial images anticipates the much-discussed sequence of shots in which an image of a lost and forlorn Sammy in some sort of mental hospital is very briefly, almost subliminally, replaced by an identical image of Leonard in the same hospital. Both shot sequences work to reinforce the notion that the story Leonard tells repeatedly about Sammy is really just Leonard's own story. But the earlier sequence, more particularly, introduces the set of related ideas that the myriad mirror images, in conjunction with the narrative, work to establish, and that the concluding references to mirrors serves to drive home: that *Memento* is a movie about the value and importance of critical self-awareness (which is also, necessarily, an awareness of others, an awareness of the world and one's relation to it); that Leonard serves as a negative example, a warning against the dangers of living in bad faith; and that just as Leonard ought to be thinking about himself in relation to the alter ego he has constructed, we too ought to be thinking hard about our connections to the figure that Leonard represents.

What is at stake here—what the film is not simply trying to foreground but to effect in its unfolding, to put into operation—is an ethics of interpretation, one that seeks to account both for the imbrication of the self in efforts at making meaning and for the extrinsic nature, the integrity, of the text. In order to respect the latter, we must—*Memento* insists—attend to the former. The aim is a kind of dialectical circuit of analytical scrutiny, toggling constantly between reader and text, self and other—a process that, as that last phrase suggests, has implications that go well beyond the

purview of textual analysis and that Leonard, for his part, effectively short circuits by refusing introspection. Meaning isn't simply there for the reading—as Lenny thinks it is in the case of his annotated Polaroids. Nor is it merely a form of wish fulfillment—as in the patently fantastic image of plenitude that Lenny conjures up in the very context of discounting the subjective nature of his vision. Making meaning, *Memento* suggests, involves two different, but connected, forms of attentiveness: a kind of reverential carefulness with regard to the text, the world, the other; and sufficient self-awareness to monitor constantly the motives underlying the sense we make of what we encounter.

The tricks *Memento* plays in its complicated and convoluted unfolding, and the re-visions it forces the viewer to work through in the course of concluding, are not designed primarily to shock—as is the case, for example, with a film like *The Sixth Sense* (1999). The aim, rather, is to call the viewer to attention, to instill in the viewer an attentiveness that is at once discriminating, generous, responsible, and self-aware.

Notes

1. In none of the three books, for example, does reading *Memento* figure as central concern. While James Mottram's *The Making of* Memento (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) does—like the other two books—offer snatches of textual analysis, its purpose, as the title suggests, is to provide a production (and to a lesser extent, a reception) history. Claire Molloy's *Memento* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010) is more analytical, and certainly more scholarly, than Mottram's book, but it, too, dramatically subordinates interpretation to other concerns: *Memento*'s place in the history of independent filmmaking; the movie's marketing, distribution, and reception; its online afterlife. Molloy analyzes the film, not as purposive structure, but as cultural commodity. The collection of essays that Andrew Kania has edited for Routledge's Philosophers on Film series (*Memento* [Abingdon: Routledge, 2009]) skews differently—but not in the direction of interpretation. Most of the essays in the volume don't set themselves the task of addressing the movie; rather, they treat it as a pretext for discussing something else. They deploy *Memento* as a thought experiment, for example, of the type frequently used by philosophers to concretize and exemplify ideas; or they present the film's protagonist as a case study, treating him as if he were real. That case study approach is also the mainstay of the journal articles and individual book chapters.

2. See Mottram, pp. 86–87: "Ultimately, through the edit, Nolan achieved the creation of a narrative so complex that even he gets lost in it when re-watching Memento. 'It's one of the things I'm proudest of with the film. Even though I have a very good memory for films—I have to, to do my job—and I've seen the film thousands of times, I still get completely lost. … That's one of the biggest achievements of the film, from my point of view." Nolan makes much the same point—in mostly the same terms—in the director's commentary track on the DVD.
3. Carlos Gallego, "Coordinating Contemporaneity: (Post)Modernity, 9/11, and the Dialectical Imagery of *Memento*," *Cultural Critique* 75 (2010), 41, hereafter cited in text.
4. Rosalind Sibielski, "Postmodern Narrative or Narrative of the Postmodern? History, Identity, and the Failure of Rationality as an Ordering Principle in *Memento*," *Literature and Psychology* 49.4 (2004), 83, hereafter cited in text.
5. Robbie B. H. Goh, "Myths of Reversal: Backwards Narratives, Normative Schizophrenia, and the Culture of Casual Agnosticism," *Social Semiotics* 18.1 (2008), 64.
6. The view that the film's narrative is unreliable is pretty close to universal. One exception here is Berys Gaut ("Telling Stories: Narration, Emotion, and Insight in *Memento*," in *Narrative, Emotion, and Insight*, ed. Noël Carroll and John Gibson [University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2011]), who, like me, sees the film's meaning as determinate and who draws a similar, though less specifically defined, conclusion—that *Memento*'s point is to show us that "We should be careful in our judgments and not respond immediately in emotionally strong fashion to events" (42).
7. "Anatomy of a Scene: *Memento*," Sundance Channel, produced by Terry Benes, 2002. Memento DVD, Lionsgate Home Entertainment, 2011. The narrator of "Anatomy of a Scene" notes that "For Nolan, limiting the film's look and location evoked the dead-end, nowhere sensibility of classic film noir."
8. Tracy K Parker, "'Do I Lie to Myself to Be Happy?': Self-Help Culture and Fragmentation in Postmodern Film." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 10.1 (2008), 3.
9. See, e.g., Gallego.
10. Christopher Nolan, "Interview with Elvis Mitchell," *Independent Focus*, Independent Film Channel.
11. William G. Little, "Surviving *Memento*," *Narrative* 13.1 (2005), 68, hereafter cited in text.
12. Andrew Kania, "What is *Memento*? Ontology and Interpretation in Mainstream Film,"in Kania, *Memento*, 170, hereafter cited in text.

13. It is worth noting that the film ends insisting on Leonard's commitment to this "romantic quest," even to the extent of setting himself up to eliminate Teddy in order to assure its continuance.
14. Christopher Nolan, "Remembering *Memento*," *Memento* DVD, Lionsgate Home Entertainment, 2011.
15. Quoted in Mottram, 31.
16. Noël Carroll, "*Memento* and the Phenomenology of Comprehending Motion Picture Narration," in Kania, *Memento*,137.
17. "Anatomy of a Scene."
18. The view of Natalie as femme fatale is as widespread as the view that the film narrative is indeterminate. One recent exception is Margaret A. Toth ("*Memento*'s Postmodern Noir Fantasy: Place, Domesticity, and Gender Identity," *The Cinema of Christopher Nolan*, ed. Jacqueline Furby and Stuart Joy [New York: Wallflower P, 2015], 74–84), who makes note of the complexity of Natalie's portrait, referring to the character as a hybrid. The femme fatale label, Toth argues, works for Natalie in some ways—mainly her manner of presentation—but in some ways doesn't—mainly because Natalie lacks the power of the traditional femme fatale.

    In another recent essay, Katherine Weese ("[Mis]Reading Natalie: The Viewer's Cognitive Processes and the Unreadable in Christopher Nolan's *Memento*," *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 7.1 [2015], 101–27) details how and why viewers misconstrue Natalie's motives: implicit in her discussion of the cognitive difficulties involved in making sense of Natalie is a recognition that, inasmuch as the character can't be easily placed, the character can't be pinned down by the femme fatale label. Weese sees Natalie as fundamentally unreadable: as for Natalie's motives, that is probably true. But the film, as my discussion of the character is meant to suggest, does give us enough information to infer her feelings toward Leonard.
19. Adrian Gargett, "Nolan's *Memento*, Memory, and Recognition," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 4.3 (2002), https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1163, n.p.
20. Andrew Spicer, "Problems of Memory and Identity in Neo-Noir's Existential Antihero," *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*, ed. Mark T. Conrad (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2007). 59.
21. George Bragues, "Memory and Morals in *Memento*," *Film-Philosophy* 12.2 (2008), 69.
22. Deborah Knight and George McKnight, "Reconfiguring the Past: *Memento* and Neo-Noir," in Kania, *Memento*, 151, my italics.
23. Nolan's commentary on the DVD makes the point abundantly clear.
24. See Llana Shiloh, "False Doubles: Christopher Nolan's *Memento*," *The Double, The Labyrinth, and the Locked Room: Metaphors of Paradox in*

Crime Fiction and Film (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 77–85, esp. 78–79; Gargett 2 of 9; and Little 68—though Little doesn't do much more than mention the connection.

25. For an extensive discussion of the ways the femme fatale label has been used to pigeonhole women in film, see Julie Grossman, *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir: Ready for Her Close-Up* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
26. That many of the film's critics, Lenny-like, refuse the invitation to introspection is not, of course, the fault of the movie.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion: Interpretation and the New Cinephilia

Interpretive criticism of the sort I want to see more extensively practiced was born out of the post-War French cinephilia most commonly associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma* (and the Anglo-American film criticism influenced by the work being done in France). As I have noted elsewhere, the *Cahiers* critics were, themselves, not particularly interested in the interpretation of individual films. What engaged and impassioned them, what they all sought out in their work, were the filmic traces of distinct artistic sensibilities.[1] The "Dossier: Nicholas Ray," in Jim Hillier's anthology of *Cahiers* work from the 50s can serve perhaps to illustrate the point. All of the pieces comprising the dossier, with the exception of the Charles Bitsch interview with Ray, are occasioned by a particular film, a point made clearer in the journal itself, where, in each case, the essay appears in the table of contents under a subheading entitled "Les Films," and where, in each case, the title of the film that is ostensibly the subject of the essay is given in parentheses. Thus, putatively at least, Jacques Rivette's "On Imagination" concerns Ray's *The Lusty Men* (1952); François Truffaut's "A Wonderful Certainty" addresses *Johnny Guitar* (1954); Eric Rohmer's "Ajax or the Cid" is about *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955); and Jean-Luc Godard's "Nothing but Cinema" considers Ray's *Hot Blood* (1956).[2] In fact, Rivette says next to nothing about *The Lusty Men*, his essay serving mainly to praise Ray as an artist, "one of those who fight it out to the finish, and can exhaust the possibilities of a development."[3] Truffaut does say a couple of particular things about *Johnny*

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7_9

Guitar—that it "is 'composed,' rather hurriedly of very long takes," that its "interest lies … in the very beautiful positioning of figures within the frame"—but the bulk of his observations have to do with Ray's work generally[4]: "All his films tell the same story" (107); "But the qualities of the film, Ray's qualities … cannot possibly be seen by anyone who has never ventured a look through a camera eyepiece" (107); "All of his films are very disjointed" (108); "There is not one of Ray's films without nightfall. He is the poet of nightfall" (108). Rohmer's essay, significantly longer than the other three, engages the film under consideration more extensively and directly. Calling *Rebel Without a Cause* "a genuine tragedy in five acts,"[5] Rohmer offers an analytical summary of the film, teasing out its theme, on his account, of tragic fate. But the same kind of generalizing force that characterizes Truffaut's essay undergirds Rohmer's as well: [N]o other director knows how to give his characters so clearly the air of having a common genealogy. They are marked with the seal of the same fate, the same moral or physical disease that is not quite taint or decay. Look at the women's faces with their soft cheeks, but the eyes ringed with shadows and the heavy lips; those athletic male silhouettes, the Ryans, the Dereks, the Mitchums, flattened, or rather drawn back into themselves. James Dean takes this even further; he is like a chrysalis badly folded out of its cocoon" (112). Godard's review of *Hot Blood*—at once dismissive of the movie as a whole while laudatory of certain of its features, the use of color for example, which Godard sees as reflecting Ray's "innate sense of cinema"—mainly concerns the tensions resulting from an auteur's less than whole-hearted involvement in a project: the review, in other words, is more about Ray as intuitive filmmaker than about the movie he directed.[6]

Yet, despite this tendency of the *Cahiers* critics to look *through* the individual work, first to the oeuvre and finally to the artistic sensibility and moral/philosophical preoccupations of the auteur who produced it, their methods, as I was saying, laid the groundwork for the development of a more fully fledged interpretive criticism. First, their pursuit of signs of the artist in a seemingly antithetical context—not just in the inherently collaborative medium of filmmaking, but in the factory like processes of production of Classical Hollywood cinema, where directors often had limited creative control—led them beyond the immediate concerns of a given movie, its given content, to a kind of latency, veiled significances. Hillier, discussing the centrality of mise-en-scene to *Cahiers* criticism in the introduction to the 50s anthology, cites John Caughie on this point: the search

for traces of authorship, Caughie argues, "effected … a shift in the way films were conceived and grasped within film criticism. The personality of the director, and the consistency within his films, were not, like the explicit subject matter which tended to preoccupy established criticism, simply there as a 'given.' They had to be sought out, discovered, by a process of analysis and attention to a number of films."[7] In other words, *Cahiers* auteurism prodded film criticism toward the production of a reading. However, what these critics were interested in reading, I want to insist, was not the individual work, but, if I can put it this way, the soul of the artist. (In an essay on the *politique des auteurs*, André Bazin notes that "for Eric Rhomer … it is the *auteurs*, and not the works, that remain," a comment that would apply, I think, equally well to the thinking of all of the *Cahiers* critics working in the mid- to late 50s and early 60s.)[8] But what they effectively produce is a form of reading for values that lie at once below (or beyond) and *on* the surface—values that are immanent (in the details of films) but not evident and that don't reduce to an unanalyzable thereness of significance.

Second, precisely because the *Cahiers* critics were searching for traces of artistic sensibility, signs of authorial presence, filmic details played a more prominent role in their criticism than had been the case in earlier work. In the Truffaut essay on Johnny Guitar mentioned above, for example, virtually the only specific thing he has to say about the movie concerns an isolated bit of mise-en-scene. After making the observation that the interest of Ray's films "lies … in the very beautiful positioning of figures within the frame," Truffaut goes on to remark, in a parenthesis, that "The posse at Vienna's is formed and moves in a V-shape, like migratory birds" (108), a wonderfully suggestive observation. The work of the *Cahiers* critics is awash in these sorts of fleeting references to film fragments—moments that, for the given writer, epitomize the personality, temperament, and habits of the artist under consideration. Having just finished offering an example of Roger Vadim's talent for mise-en-scene in a discussion of Vadim's *No Sun in Venice* (Sait-on jamais? 1957), for instance, Godard goes on as follows: "Another example: the now celebrated shot from the pigeons' point of view. While Sforzi philosophizes with Michel and Sophie in St Mark's Square amid the hellish noise of pigeon wings, the camera suddenly shifts without warning to the rooftops and looks down on the square from, if I may venture to say so, the viewpoint of Sirius. I would bet that Vadim had not planned this shot, and got the idea for it when he was preparing to shoot the scene. It is an arbitrary shot, admittedly, but

arbitrary *a posteriori*. Its violent beauty redeems its purpose."[9] No interpretive value is drawn from the detail. And nothing more is said about it. The reason for bringing it into relief is to provide evidence that Vadim is, in Godard's estimation, "the best of the young French directors working today" (47). And here is Rivette, in an essay designed to make a case, as the essay title would have it, for "The Genius of Howard Hawks": "It is impossible adequately to evoke *To Have and Have Not* without immediately recalling the struggle with the fish at the beginning of the film. The universe cannot be conquered without a fight, and fighting is natural to Hawks's heroes: hand-to-hand fighting. What closer grasp of another being could be hoped for than a vigorous struggle like this?"[10] Here, the filmic detail does carry thematic weight, but as the reference to "Hawks's heroes" (in the plural) suggests, the value in drawing attention to the theme lies in its being common to Hawks films generally, a preoccupation that defines his artistic vision. One more (such examples could be trotted out at length): in the context of a discussion of the "Evolution of the Thriller," an essay on genre that keeps circling back to the contributions of individual directors, Claude Chabrol notes of Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944), that "Everything happens as if the characters had been created before the plot … as if they themselves were constructing the plot. … To accentuate this impression, Preminger thought up a new narrative technique … long sequences shot from a crane, following the key characters in each scene in their every move, so that these characters, *immutably* fixed in the frame (usually in close-up or in a two-shot), see the world around them evolving and changing in accordance to their action."[11] It's an acute observation about the rhetoric of the movie, but again the value of the observed detail concerns the capacities of the artist who produced it—a point made clear in the subsequent sentence: "Here was proof that a thriller can also be beautiful and profound, that it is a question of style and conviction" (161).

The combination of these two features of the work being done at *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 50s and early 60s—a commitment, in Hillier's terms, to "a process of analysis" and a concern for filmic detail—only occasionally produced sustained interpretations of individual movies. But, again, this approach to writing about film did lay the groundwork for the more systematically interpretive criticism practiced most influentially at *Movie*. That in the case of both journals (and others founded in the aftermath of the war in France, England, the United States, and elsewhere) the writing reflected, indeed sprang from, a love of cinema is both a

matter of historical record and palpably evident in the essays themselves. Fereydoun Hoveyda begins his review of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* exclaiming, "*Les 400 Coups* is not a masterpiece. So much the better for François Truffaut!"[12] After summarizing an apparently widespread critical resistance to Chabrol's *Les Bonnes femmes* (1960), André S. Labarthe writes, "It will by now be clear, I think, that I regard Chabrol's last film as not just his masterpiece, but the high point of the new French cinema as a whole."[13] V. F. Perkins, writing about "The Cinema of Nicholas Ray" for *Movie*, is somewhat more measured, but not by much: "[W]hile insisting on Ray's genius in conveying the general through the particular, the abstract through the concrete, I have no wish to claim that it is uniquely *his* gift. It is simply the ability which distinguishes the true film-maker from the pseudo-director who provides 'photographs of people talking.' And it is an ability one feels not just in Ray's direction of his actors but in his use of the entire vocabulary of film."[14] Worth noting in this context is that both *Cahiers* and *Movie* early on adopted the practice of assigning reviews to those who liked the films: the editorial policies at both journals, at least initially in the case of *Cahiers*, were thus explicitly cinephilic in orientation.

As is also well known, such cinephilia was largely put into abeyance in the late 60s and early 70s. The reasons, as Christian Keathley has pointed out, are in part historical. *Cahiers*-style cinephilia depended for its existence, Keathley argues, on the maintenance of a "dynamic balance," where films were concerned, "of availability and rarity"[15]: the cinephile had to have enough access to movies to make the cinephilic experience possible; but the chances for engaging movies had to be rare enough for the experience to be seen as having value. "For the cinephile," he writes, "the auratic experience of moviegoing was in an important way prompted by … restricted availability" (21). The increasing prominence of television and then video, Keathley goes on to suggest, disturbed this balance between scarcity and accessibility.[16] Then, too, Keathley notes, the moment the state recognized the cultural importance of film as a medium (as marked in France by its attempt to assert some control over programming at the Cinémathèque), cinephilia lost a good deal of its cachet: "With [mainstream cultural] validation, cinephilia lost the clandestine, counter-cultural energy on which it had thrived for so long" (27).

But as a number of film scholars have pointed out, one of the main reasons for what Keathley refers to as "The Death of Cinephilia" was the hard turn in film studies in the late 60s and early 70s toward theory.[17] The

issue was doctrinal: cinema, especially the classical Hollywood cinema that had been central to 50s and 60s cinephilia, had to be unmasked, exposed as an instrument of ideological indoctrination. As Thomas Elsaesser puts it, "Central to the agenda [of film studies post 1969] was the need to prove that Hollywood cinema is a bad object."[18] As Elsaesser suggests, however, this turning away from, or against, the love of film contained tensions. He describes the move in terms of "disenchantment"—a complicated effort at disillusionment articulating a conflicted denial of a love still felt. For Elsaesser, the Marxist inflected psycho-semiotics of the 70s is the verso to an earlier cinephilia's recto—two sides of the same coin.

This tension in theory's rejection of cinephilia is apparent in the palpably strained effort on the part of the editors at *Cahiers du Cinéma* in1969 "to find grounds," as I put it in an earlier chapter, "for distinguishing progressive from reactionary film texts." One senses in the effort—this painstaking sorting of the good from the bad, this Dantean charting of levels of irredeemability—a kind of poignant desire to find some small refuge for love. But such tensions are also at play in much of the theorizing itself—nowhere more obviously than in Stephen Heath's long, almost painfully patient, detailing of the ideological processes at work in the cinema. Essays like "Narrative Space" and "Film and System" are not really *about* the movies they use as points of departure. They are about cinematic codes and systems. But has anyone ever watched a movie more closely than Heath watched *Touch of Evil*? "[W]hat extraordinary effervescence," Elsaesser exclaims, "what subtle intellectual flavors and bubbling energy the heady brew of screen theory generated in those early years! It testifies to the hidden bliss of disenchantment" (35).

Another kind of tension that was involved in the work, the working out, of film theory centered around interpretation. For while much of the writing sponsored by theory's engagement with film was interpretive, much of that work also reflected a kind of disdain for reading films. To take the most ready instance to hand, while Heath's "Film and System" is, as he says at the outset of the essay, "devoted to the analysis of a single film,"[19] he quickly qualifies the statement: "What is in question is not the proposal of a meaning … the point is not to wage a war of interpretations; rather it is a matter of showing the *design* of the film in its system" (9), by which he means the ways it operates, the psycho-social/cultural/ideological work that it does. And throughout, he is dismissive when it comes to meaning: "The beginning of *Touch of Evil* is obvious in its banality" he remarks at one point (50); "No film is more obvious than *Touch of Evil*,"

he says at another (68). What we have, in effect, is a form of interpretation that is uncomfortable with the *idea* of interpretation.

Or, to flip the issue around (reversing the poles, as it were), and to move away from what is becoming a too-strict focus on *Screen* theory: At the very outset of the "Preface" to *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis explains that "these essays … carry on an argument by means of textual readings."[20] Unlike Heath, that is, de Lauretis seems to accept, even to endorse, the theoretical pertinency of interpretation. In fact, however, the sustained reading of literary and film texts is a fairly marginal concern in *Technologies of Gender*, the focus only of the middle third of the book. De Lauretis's text is very much in dialog with other texts, but for the most part they are texts written by other theoreticians. In other words, the hesitancy concerning interpretation that Heath openly expresses can be sensed, I want to say, in the choices de Lauretis makes concerning the types of texts she wants to address, to be in conversation with. Let me be clear: my aim in these comments about Heath and de Lauretis is not to object either to the theorizing or to the particular theoretical positions expressed. Both writers are clearly brilliant; and the value of their contributions to our understanding of literature, film, and culture can hardly be overstated. What I am trying to identify in these works is a kind of doubt about the importance of interpretation that accompanied the turn to theory.

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The kind of fatigue with theory and the hermeneutics of suspicion that, as I mentioned in Chap. 6, prompted Rita Felski to write *The Uses of Literature*, was a marked feature of film studies by the late 1990s. Announced most aggressively, of course, in David Bordwell's and Noël Carroll's *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (the culmination, one wants to say, of long-standing antagonisms[21]) this fatigue could also be felt in a reawakening desire to celebrate film and films. Prompted initially by Susan Sontag's nostalgic lamentation over "The Decay of Cinema," writers in a number of different contexts began defending film culture and the love of films and reclaiming identities as cinephiles.[22] Paul Willemen, who somehow managed to bridge the distance between cinephilia and theory in the 70s and 80s, included an extended discussion of cinephilia (in the form of an interview with Australian film studies scholar Noel King), in his 1994 collection of essays *Looks and Frictions. Senses of Cinema*, an explicitly cinephilic online film journal founded in 1999 included early on a two

part series on cinephilia comprised of five essays on the subject.[23] *Cinéaste* published an essay on "The Politics of American Cinephilia" in 2002.[24] Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin's collection of eclectic essays on the subject appeared in 2003. Both *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, edited by Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener and Christian Keathley's *Cinephilia and History* were published in 2005. By 2010, the "New Cinephilia," as it had come to be called,[25] was a recognized cultural phenomenon. "As was the case for authorship around 1990," writes Mark Betz at the outset of an "Introduction" to an In Focus feature on cinephilia in a 2010 issue of *Cinema Journal*, "in the last decade the tide has turned for cinephilia. Raised from the critical doldrums in which it had drifted since the 1970s, it has in the new millennium [sic] gathered momentum in the form of an outpouring of published essays, special journal issues, and book-length collections (as well as a singly authored monograph) devoted to its numerous manifestations and implications."[26] The rapid growth of the internet during this period added fuel to this particular fire by providing a theoretically limitless array of forums for cinephiles of all makes and models (academics, journalists, independent scholars, motivated autodidacts, and just average film buffs) to weigh in on all aspects of film culture and, at least potentially, all films.

* * *

To the extent that cinephilia has been theorized, it has mostly been theorized in terms of affect—physical and emotional responses to film. The series of letters with which *Movie Mutations* begins, for example, repeatedly foregrounds the centrality of the sensual—more pointedly, the somatic—to the writers' conception of cinephilia, especially in the letter by Alexander Horwath ("I was enchanted to the same extent by Peter Kubelka, Godard and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)—mainly because of their 'gesticular' power, which turned my encounters with them into almost corporeal events"; "I almost forgot another significant common interest [among the cinephiles of my generation]: avant-garde cinema. Isn't this the place where the weight of the physical, the material/manual use of film are most tangible?").[27] Keathley underscores the same point: "I argue," he writes in the introduction, "that an encounter with a cinephiliac moment is not just a visual experience, but also a more broadly sensuous one; it is an experience that has been repeatedly linked in critical writing to the haptic, the tactile, and the bodily" (8). There is a logic to

this linkage, of course. Cinephilia concerns the love of film, thus an affective relation to film texts.

But in discussions of cinephilia, affect is often pitted against cognition, as if an effort at understanding a movie or a movie moment were somehow antithetical to having an emotional or physical response to the film or film fragment. This opposition is pursued most pointedly, perhaps, by Keathley. At the very outset of the book, for example, he describes a moment he loves in John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). "What," he asks, "can the methods of analysis ordinarily practiced in the discipline of film studies tell us about this moment, or about my response to it?" (2). By "the methods of analysis ordinarily practiced in the discipline of film studies" Keathley surely means hermeneutics, textual exegesis—which, as he immediately goes on to make clear, he assumes to be unable to account for affect, or at least the kind of affective experience that comes from a viewer's cathecting onto an isolated and seemingly insignificant detail from a film. What can the ordinary methods of film criticism tell us about a moment Keathley finds beautiful? "Unfortunately," he says, "not much" (2). A bit further along in the introduction, Keathley is even more explicit. Situating his work in the context of reception studies, he notes: "In contrast to much reception studies work of the past decade, which has regularly explored the ways in which specific identity groups make meaning of films or parts of films, this book considers an area of spectatorial experience that resists co-optation by meaning; indeed, if the cinephiliac moment is among the most intense of cinematic experiences, it seems to draw its intensity partly from the fact that it cannot be reduced or tamed by interpretation" (8–9). In Keathley's formulation, the work of making meaning of movies gets figured as a form of violence, a form of colonization, perhaps, or perhaps of sexual assault—raping the text rather than loving it. And cinephilic experience, if I can be allowed the indulgence of playing around with disparate metaphors, comes across as a kind resistant energy, a plucky Rebel Force, say, at war with the Empire of Interpretation.

As the references to the "cinephiliac" (with an "a," as opposed to "cinephilic") "moment" suggest, Keathley draws heavily on the influential Willemen/King conversation on the topic of cinephilia, which centers and circles around consideration of just such moments (the phrase "cinephiliac moment" surfacing—apparently as a happy accident—during the course of the conversation). But whereas Keathley is consistent in seeing these moments as being at odds with hermeneutics, a kind of outside of representation,[28] Willemen and King are not. Their position on the relation

between affect and cognition is ambiguous, maybe even muddy. And the ambiguity and muddiness are, it seems to me, of interest and of value. There are points, to be sure, where they seem to suggest that the experience of cinephiliac moments is at odds with understanding. "[T]he discourse of cinephilia," Willemen says early on, has centrally to do with a "moment of revelation" (236), a moment that stands out from the narrative that contains it and that gives access to "something that escape[s] rationalised, critical-theoretical discourse" (233). It's a strain of thought that crops up fairly regularly. "What matters," Willemen notes a bit later, "is that something should be perceived as in excess of the film's register … as potentially undesigned, unprogrammable" (238–39). The fetishized moments of revelation that comprise cinephilia are, he says, "in excess of representation" (240). They gesture beyond themselves, to something that "points to an elsewhere" (241). All of this is in keeping with Keathley's view of the issue.

In a different context, however, Willemen explicitly links the fetishism of filmic details with meaning. King asks Willemen whether the reading of Douglas Sirk's mise-en-scene as ironic constitutes a form of cinephilia. After first opposing "two different Sirks"—"Fassbinder's Sirk" and his own Sirk—Willemen concludes: "In the end, why I fetishize Sirk comes closer to why Fassbinder does the same, in the sense that I'm preoccupied by the same problem, although not from the same position. I'm not a director of actors but I'm equally concerned to read a kind of social pathology, as it transpires, into or through a film" (244–45). Ultimately, for Willemen, the fetishization of Douglas Sirk films, the cinephilia that organized itself around Sirk, has everything to do with meaning: "What was shining through [Sirk's films], in the form of people's gestures, intonations and the like, was a whole X-ray view of American middle-class disintegration" (246). The very title of the essay, "Through a Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered," derives from an observation about the thematic functioning of the credit sequence of *Imitation of Life* (1959): "We were all concerned to explain the way a Sirk film allowed us to glimpse, at work in American society, 'through a glass darkly,' a whole set of frustrations, problems, and pathologies" (245). At another point, Willemen is at pains to insist that pleasure must be analyzed, understood—and even comments on the "pleasure of understanding," which he sees as having been "systematically denigrated and denied" (251).

What I find compelling in the tensions that run through the Willemen/King conversation is that they suggest the stickiness of meaning, the

difficulty (really, I would say, the impossibility) of leaving meaning behind. They make clear that moments of pleasure, however fetishistic, don't arise in a vacuum, don't pull us wholly outside the narratives in which we find them but are part of those narratives—and that our pleasure in fact derives from a sense of the resonances occurring at a given moment between part and whole, inside and outside, fragment and text. As George Toles succinctly puts the point in an essay I will return to, "it is, after all, the felt combination of a given moment with its surrounding circumstances that allows it to 'lift off' emotionally."[29]

In Chap. 7, I offered an interpretation of Polanski's *Chinatown*, a movie I love. I have, in fact, loved it from the first time I saw it during its initial theatrical release. The film somehow spoke to me. It seemed—in some nebulous, subterranean way—directly addressed to me. My interpretation was an effort, not just to figure out what the movie was saying, but, by doing so, to better understand why I was responding to it the way I was. The interpretation I ended up producing cannot fully account for my (intellectual, psychological, affective, somatic) response to *Chinatown*. It is in no way adequate to all I have thought and felt about the film. Nor can the one interpretive effort pull into its purview all the elements that inform, that constitute, my personal relation to the movie, all those moments that I find so, well, moving: neither those that are seemingly incidental (the way Jake walks after getting caught in the spillway and losing one of his Florsheim shoes), nor the more obviously purposive (the way Evelyn stutters whenever she talks about her father). But the seemingly inconsequential moments, and my feelings about them, are as tied to the meanings of *Chinatown* as are its clearly significant features, and my feelings about *them*. Jake walks the way he does after nearly drowning in the spillway—a disheartened but nonetheless aggressive limp—not just because he is soaking wet, but because he is the character he is: the awkward shuffle registers both defeat and defiance, signaling, through gesture, Jake's way of being in the world. Both the weariness and the resistance to that weariness are part of his make-up and part of why I find the character interesting, worthy of attention. My awareness of the way Jake is moving does, in some sense, or rather at some level, draw me away from the narrative inasmuch as, in that moment of his walking, I am thinking both of Jack Nicholson and his star text, my understanding of *his* way of being in the world, and of what it feels like to walk when one is fully dressed and thoroughly drenched. But my perception of these extra-narrative elements isn't really at odds with my on-going processes of

intellection. In the form of a gesture, Jack's/Jake's labored walking, reality may for a moment peak at me (or I at it), but that experience doesn't lie outside the meaning of the movie: it is, if I may be permitted, always already becoming part of that meaning.

Again, many such details could not make their way into a single reading of Polanski's film. But more of them could have—if the reading had ampler scope, a book-length study, for instance, or if I wrote another essay, then another. My point is simply that every filmic detail of any given movie—as well as the reasons we might notice that detail—folds at some juncture into a sense of what the film is doing, what it is saying, what it means.

Finally, I draw attention to the tensions that mark the Willemen/King conversation, and to the way those tensions seem to signal the importance of recognizing the connections that exist between affective and cognitive responses to films, because, although it is true that cinephilia has mostly been *theorized* in terms of an opposition to narrative meaning, a good deal of the writing that that has appeared under the aegis of the New Cinephilia has devoted itself to the interpretation of individual films or film fragments. The internet is, of course, a rapidly expanding universe, and online musings about movies are very varied—in almost all ways (length, breadth, depth, focus, quality). But within this mass of material, one can find a lot of compelling interpretive work being done. Not Coming to a Theater Near You, a site managed—or, perhaps more appropriately, edited or curated—by Rumsey Taylor includes, in a Review section, discussions of films that blend interpretation and evaluation reminiscent of the work in early *Movie*.[30] A Features section contains a handful of essays on individual works that are longer and more substantive. These essays, sometimes produced by multiple authors, engage the details of the films and offer commentary on the films' aims. Michael Sicinski's site The Academic Hack pulls together elegantly written, thoughtful analyses (that have been published by Sicinski in a variety of venues) of scores of films.[31] Dennis Cozzalio's and Thom McGregor's unabashedly cinephilic Sergio Leone and the Infield Fly Rule intersperses, among the brief reviews, sustained examinations of many movies.[32] This short list of references represents just a tiny fraction of what's available online. And while, again, the quality of the work available on the internet is certainly mixed, one can, if one is patient, run across engaged, enlightening film criticism there.

But the more conventionally published work on cinephilia also includes a good deal of interpretation. The inaugural issue of *Senses of Cinema*, for

instance, in addition to a top-ten list, a consideration of Greek-Australian filmmakers, a "poetic homage" to Jean-Pierre Melville's *Army of Shadows* (L'armée des ombres, 1969), and a tribute to Robert Bresson, includes readings of Jane Campion's *Sweetie* (1989), Jackie Farkas's *Amelia Rose Towers* (1992), and Claire Denis's *Chocolat* (1988). To drive the point home: the essay on Farkas's film is entitled "Interpretations of *Amelia Rose Towers*," and the piece on *Chocolat* is described on the home page as "a postcolonial reading" of the film. The blurb for the essay on *Sweetie*, characterized as "An intriguing and sensitive discussion of Jane Campion's *Sweetie* (1989) that blends a personal, affective reading (specified as gender-based) with critical analysis in order to arrive at an understanding of the very complex way in which Campion's films address the viewer as female" speaks even more directly to the coordination of affect and cognition that seems, as I suggest above, a hallmark of the New Cinephelia. Girish Shambu, whose book on the subject presents an insightful and theoretically informed introduction to digital-age Cinephilia, and who (of course) also maintains a film blog, addresses related conjunctions in a "Manifesto for the New Cinephilia": "The pleasures at the heart of the old cinephilia are predominantly aesthetic. The new cinephilia has a broader definition of pleasure: it values the aesthetic experience of cinema, but it demands more. It finds pleasure, additionally, in a deep curiosity about the world and a critical engagement with it … Traditional cinephilic pleasure is private, personal, inward … The new cinephilia radiates outward, powered by a spirit of inquiry and a will to social and planetary change."[33]

* * *

I want to end with a consideration of two essays that seem to me to negotiate interestingly the complex ways that love relates to understanding (and vice versa) and that affective affinity can lead to engagement with the world. The two essays appear at the end of the *Cinema Journal* In Focus feature on cinephilia from 2010. Both focus on fragments, isolated moments from individual films, and both are described by Mark Betz in his introduction to the special feature as "unapologetic textual analyses" (132)—a phrase that seems to me to resonate powerfully with the general concerns of the present study, the implication being, of course, that in preceding decades one would necessarily have to apologize for offering, in a film studies essay, nothing more than textual analysis. Toles's contribution takes as its subject some scenes near (and including) the conclusion of

William Wellman's *Other Men's Wives* (1931) and his aim, as he states it, is to make the case that "cinephilia might find fresh fields to cultivate in the realm of movie fragments" (161). Such an emphasis is in keeping, of course, with the theoretical positions elaborated by Willemen and Keathley. But the value of the fragment, for Toles, doesn't lie in its separateness from the surrounding narrative—its apartness from context and its resistance, in Keathley's terms, to "co-optation by meaning." "I am not suggesting," Toles writes, "that the stray luminous passages in otherwise disposable or broken narratives ought to be scavenged catch-as-catch-can with no regard for the film worlds which engendered them" (161). Indeed, as the passage I quoted earlier, and to which I now want to return, makes clear, the pleasure we derive from these "luminous fragments" is inextricable from our experience of them as part of a larger structure: "The fragments," he notes, "warrant being respectfully placed and considered within their narrative context; it is, after all, the felt combination of a given moment with its surrounding circumstances that allows it to 'lift off' emotionally. The context, at the very least, supplies a space and occasion for what emerges" (161). And yet it is not just the connections between fragment and film that matter (the cinephile's sense that "the inconsequential is essential—a possible key to the whole design" [161]). More important still are the ways a given fragment resonates with other such fragments—in and outside of the particular film under consideration: "the brief passages that rise above the rest are also, arguably, in communion with each other, sharing a higher pitch of awareness and a secret network of correspondences. Perhaps they are seeking to actualize another, better imaginative realm within the movie's vexing limits. At the same time these fragments link up with kindred episodes in other more fully realized films, which seem to conjure up alternative homes for them, more spacious and attuned to their bewitching qualities. The stubbornly alive particles and remnants of a forgotten movie have elective affinities with the larger, always unfolding Utopian narrative of cinema at large" (161).

Chris Darke's analysis of "The Moment of Epiphany" in Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (El espiritu de la colmena, 1973), which mainly concerns just a few seconds of footage recording a cinephilic moment as it is being experienced both by the main character, Ana, and the young actress who plays her (Ana Torrent), is much more indebted than Tole's to the conceptual framework laid out by Willemen and Keathley, both of whom he cites. Darke, that is, discusses the cinephilic moment in terms of the revelation of an "excess"—"an excess … related [on Willemen's

account] to a mysterious dimension of spectatorship designated as the 'elsewhere' or 'beyond' of cinematic representation" (155). But for Darke, this beyond is not just some space outside of meaning, a kind of affective harbor. Making use of Vicky Lebeau's work on "the figure of the child in early cinema" (156), Darke goes on to suggest that Ana and her epiphany serve a dual function, "both to incarnate the unruly polysemy of the image and to bind it to narrative. … What escapes from the narrative of *Frankenstein*, via Ana, into *The Spirit of the Beehive* forms the major coordinates of its narrative" (156). One way of appropriating the terms of the analysis for my purposes would be to say that Ana's epiphanic moment functions as a circuit leading away from, then back into meaning: "One may … regard *The Spirit of the Beehive* as a chronicle of the child's newly sparked imaginative engagement with the world through cinema" (157). Like Toles, that is, but in a quite different way, Darke is interested in a cinephilia that serves as a conduit to something else, something larger than itself—deeper understandings, in one case, richer, more creative encounters, in the other, with the world that lies "beyond" the cinema.

It is my hope that the renewed interest in our affective affinities to films can perform something of the same function as did the cinephilia of the 50s and 60s: that in stimulating interest in engaging the concrete particularities of individual movies, the New Cinephilia will serve to sponsor, as it has already to some extent done, the channeling of more energy and resources into the production of engaged and engaging readings of films. I suppose one way of seeing all of the preceding is as an attempt to nudge things in that direction.

Notes

1. Jim Hillier makes this corollary point: "We should remember that *Cahiers* critics very rarely tried to recreate or reconstruct the films they reviewed (a methodology more associated with Robin Wood and *Movie*); rather, they tried to construct the conceptual key that would unlock the work, and the *oeuvre*." Jim Hillier, "Introduction: Part II: American Cinema," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*," ed. Jim Hillier (Harvard UP, 1985), p. 78.
2. In most cases, *Cahiers du Cinéma* gives the titles of American films in English, but with the Godard essay, the journal uses the title under which the film was released in France, *L'ardente gitane*. See *Cahiers du Cinéma* 68 (February 1957), p. 1.

3. Jacques Rivette, "On Imagination," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 105.
4. François Truffaut, "A Wonderful Certainty," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 108, hereafter cited in text.
5. Eric Rohmer, "Ajax or the Cid," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*," p. 113, hereafter cited in text.
6. Jean-Luc Godard, "Nothing but Cinema," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*," p. 117.
7. John Caughie, "Introduction," *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (Routledge, 1981), p. 11; cited in Jim Hillier, "Introduction: Part I: French Cinema," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 10.
8. André Bazin, "On the politique des auteurs," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 250.
9. Jean-Luc Godard, "Sufficient Evidence," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 49, hereafter cited in text.
10. Jacques Rivette, "The Genius of Howard Hawks," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 130.
11. Claude Chabrol, "Evolution of the Thriller," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 161, hereafter cited in text.
12. Fereydoun Hoveyda: "The First Person Plural," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 53.
13. André S. Labarthe, "The Purest Vision: *Les Bonnes Femmes*," *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Harvard UP, 1986), p. 49.
14. V. F. Perkins, "The Cinema of Nicholas Ray," *Movie* 9 (1963), 5.
15. Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Indiana UP, 2005), p. 20, hereafter cited in text.
16. In his description of cinephilia as having arisen in conjunction with the advent of television, Keathley is surely working off Paul Willemen's comments concerning the need to "historicise" cinephilia: "I would say that cinephilia describes a relationship to cinema that is still uncontaminated by a relationship to television although it was constructed within the period when television became a cultural presence." Paul Willemen, "Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered," *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994), p. 228, hereafter cited in text. In the same passage from which this quote is taken, Willemen also addresses, though somewhat obliquely, the issues of scarcity and accessibility that Keathley takes up.
17. "The Death of Cinephilia" is the title of a chapter subheading in *Cinephilia and History*, p. 18.
18. Thomas Elsaesser, "The Uses of Disenchantment," *Cinephilia: Movies, Love, and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2005), p. 34.

19. Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part I," *Screen* 16.1 (1975), 7, hereafter cited in text.
20. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), p. ix, hereafter cited in text.
21. See, e.g., the dust-up—or, better perhaps, donnybrook—between Noël Carroll and Stephen Heath in the pages of *October* in 1983: Noël Carroll, "Address to the Heathen," *October* 23 (1983), 89–163; and Stephen Heath, "Pere Noël," *October* 26 (1983), 63–115.
22. Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1996.
23. The special feature, entitled Permanent Ghosts: Cinephilia in the Age of Internet and Video, appeared in issues 4 (March 2000: http://sensesofcinema.com/issues/issue-4/) and 5 (April 2000: http://sensesofcinema.com/issues/issue-5/).
24. Richard Porton, "The politics of American Cinephilia: From the Popular Front to the Age of Video," *Cinéaste* 27 (2002), 4–10.
25. The phrase serves as title for a short monograph published in 2014: Girish Shambu, *The New Cinephilia* (Kino-Agora, 2014). De Valck and Hagener refer to the cinephilia of the digital age as "Cinephilia 2."
26. Mark Betz, "Introduction," In Focus: Cinephilia, *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (2010), 130, hereafter cited in text.
27. Alexander Horwath, "Movie Mutations: Letters from (and to) Some Children of 1960," *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin (London: BFI, 2003), pp. 15, 17.
28. "The moments in which I am most interested," Keathley writes at one point, "are those that achieve [a] level of memorability—especially if only subjectively—even though they are not designed to" (33). He refers to Roland Barthe's efforts "to identify that element in photographic representation that exceeds semiology's capacity to assign meaning" (34). "In the *Pleasure of the Text*," Keathley continues, "Barthes contrasted representation to figuration, arguing that while the former is an organization of cultural and ideological meanings, resulting in *plaisire* (pleasure), the latter is beyond such generalizable meaning, marked by *jouissance* (bliss)—the individual's fetishistic, bodily experience of pleasure" (34). Seeing the work of Walter Pater as shedding light on the idea of the cinephiliac moment, Keathley notes that the focus of Pater's attention was the kind of detail that "exist[ed] less in the work of art itself than in the spectator's epiphanic experience of it" (35).
29. George Toles, "Rescuing Fragments: A New Task for Cinephilia," *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (2010), 161, hereafter cited in text.

30. Not Coming to a Theater Near You can be found at http://notcoming.com.
31. The Academic Hack can be found at http://academichack.net.
32. Sergio Leone and the Infield Fly Rule can be found at http://sergioleoneifr.blogspot.com.
33. Girish Shambu, "Manifesto: For a New Cinephilia," *Film Quarterly* 72.3 (2019), 32.

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P. Novak, *Interpretation and Film Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44739-7

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